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PSYNOPSIS

CANADA'S PSYCHOLOGY MAGAZINE

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH: APPLICATION TO POLICY MAKING, INTERVENTIONS, AND/OR PROGRAMMING

PSYNOPSIS

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Psynopsis is the official magazine of the Canadian Psychological Association. Its purpose is to bring the practice, study, and science of psychology to bear upon topics of concern and interest to the Canadian public. Each issue is themed and most often guest edited by a psychologist member of the CPA with expertise in the issue's theme. The magazine's goal isn't so much the transfer of knowledge from one psychologist to another, but the mobilization of psychological knowledge to partners, stakeholders, funders, decision-makers, and the public at large, all of whom have interest in the topical focus of the issue. Psychology is the study, practice, and science of how people think, feel, and behave. Be it human rights, healthcare innovation, climate change, or medical assistance in dying, how people think, feel, and behave is directly relevant to almost any issue, policy, funding decision, or regulation facing individuals, families, workplaces, and society.

Through *Psynopsis*, our hope is to inform discussion, decisions, and policies that affect the people of Canada. Each issue is shared openly with the public and specifically with government departments, funders, partners, and decision-makers whose work and interests, in a particular issue's focus, might be informed by psychologists' work. The CPA's organizational vision is a society that values and applies psychological science in the benefit of persons, communities, organizations, and peoples. *Psynopsis* is one important way that the CPA endeavours to realize this vision.

PSYNOPSIS

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE CANADIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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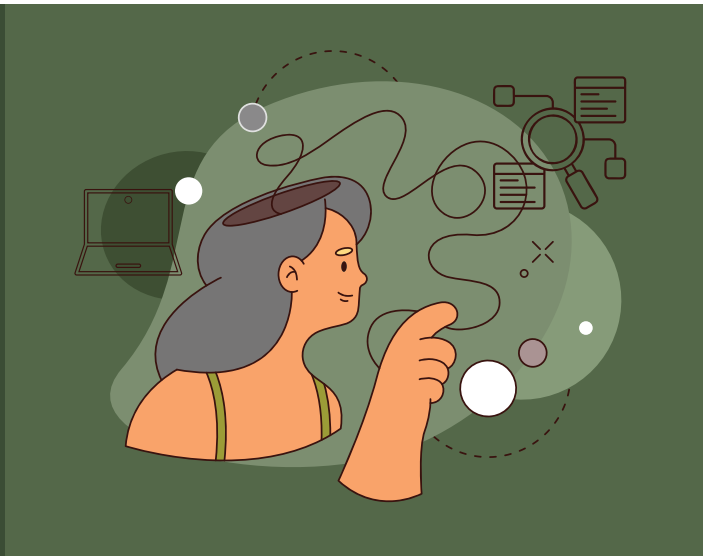

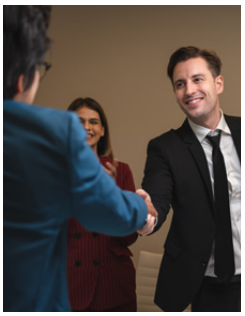

MESSAGE FROM THE GUEST EDITORS

Lauren Thompson, Ph.D.
Science Director, Canadian Psychological Association, Ottawa, ON

Adam Sandford, Ph.D., OCT
Associate Head of Psychology, University of Guelph-Humber; Director representing Science, CPA Board of Directors, Toronto, ON

Background and purpose of this *Psynopsis* Issue

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) is organized around three pillars of psychology: Science, Practice, and Education. Undoubtedly, all three pillars are integral to the field of psychology; science though, is the cornerstone of the discipline. Without rigorous scientific research, we cannot inform practice or advocate for practitioners; similarly, without scientific evidence, there would be little on which to educate people.

In this issue of *Psynopsis*, we set out to highlight the importance of applying empirical evidence to real-world settings. Psychological science offers empirical insights into how people think, feel, and behave, and these insights are essential for designing policies and programs that produce meaningful results when applied. Whether it's improving mental health services, boosting educational outcomes, or promoting public health behaviours, psychological science helps tailor interventions to human nature.

And we know that psychological science can impact real-world settings in myriad ways with its wide array of subfields from forensic, to industrial/organizational, cognitive, developmental, personality, to environmental – to name just a view.

Rigorous research has resulted in many evidence-based recommendations being used in practice. Below we list a few specific examples:

1. Research examining eyewitness identification (a field within criminal justice psychology) has resulted in best practice recommendations for the collection and preservation of eyewitness evidence.[1]
2. Industrial/organizational researchers have identified several strategies to improve workplace well-being, including adding mindfulness training.[2]
3. Social and cognitive researchers have noted the value of empirical research in threat navigation, social and cultural influences on behaviour, science communication, moral decision-making, leadership, and stress and coping on people's behaviour during pandemics.[3]

As the examples above illustrate, psychological research has delivered many important recommendations; however, to have an impact on people and society, recommendations need to be applied. Application of psychological research can involve mobilization of knowledge for policy making, implementation of research design for interventions, and development and evaluation of programming in applied settings. Application of research can occur within various settings, for example, organizations (e.g., government, international), institutions (e.g., universities, hospitals), and workplaces.

This issue of *Psynopsis* is timely for highlighting some important ways in which psychological research can be actioned for human flourishing. In the first article entitled *How can we strengthen the relationship between research and advocacy?*, Glenn Brimacombe highlights some advocacy skills we can use to secure research funding so that we can all continue to advance research, knowledge, and application of psychology in the service of societies.

In the next article entitled *Translating child trauma research into action: The CRTC's journey to inform interventions and policy*, Dr. Nathalie Reid, Dr. Lise Milne, and Shuangbo Liu discuss the University of Regina's Child Trauma Research Centre, a hub that connects academia, industry, government, and community partners through research, knowledge mobiliza-

tion, and advocacy for evidence-based benefits for children, youth, and care providers. Dr. Sarah Dermody, in the article *Science meets policy: How psychology research is shaping FDA nicotine regulations*, discusses several ways in which psychological science and collaboration have shaped FDA nicotine regulations, with potential for policy making in Canada. In the article entitled *Addressing polysubstance use: How psychology research can inform policy and intervention*, Ashmita Mazumder, Dr. Marc Fournier, and Dr. Suzanne Erb discuss some challenges and promises of translating psychological research on polysubstance use for actionable policy. Next, Dr. Felix Cheung, in the article entitled *The psychological roots of the well-being revolution*, highlights the role of psychological research in shaping policy making on well-being for *all* and inclusive frameworks for ethical governance.

Given the importance of public trust in science for many functions in daily life, these articles serve as much-needed reminders of the role that we all have in our discipline to inform and apply our knowledge from empirical evidence to policy making, intervention development, and program implementation and evaluation. We encourage you to read the articles in this issue, reflect on how your own work can be applied in various ways, and with whom to collaborate to enhance the meaningful work that you already do through application of research for the good of all members of our societies.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Lisa Votta-Bleeker, Ph.D.
CEO, CPA, and Editor-in-Chief, *Psynopsis*

Welcome to Volume 47, Issue #2 of *Psynopsis – Psychological Research: Application to Policy Making, Interventions, and/or Programming.*

A special thank you to the Guest Editors of this issue…Dr. Adam Sandford, Director representing Science on the CPA's Board of Directors, and Dr. Lauren Thompson, Scientific Affairs Director in the CPA's Head Office.

The application of psychological science is an issue near and dear to me – it was a driving force throughout my academic studies and has remained a critical focus for me throughout my professional career. I tell many people my story of pursuing a non-traditional career path outside of health services delivery and academia as a psychological scientist. This has allowed me to engage in research that could influence policy- and program-delivery decision-making. I was fortunate to be involved in or lead psychological research projects that changed the ways in which:

- Wraparound health services were delivered to families of children with asthma and cystic fibrosis,
- Pediatric intensive care units engaged parents in the decision-making process to withdraw life support from critically ill children,
- Intake and outreach services were delivered at a youth homeless shelter,
- Parents entered into safe-driving agreements with their newly licensed youth, and
- Hoteliers and homebuilders considered the inclusion of grab bars in washroom builds to prevent bathtub-related falls.

Human behaviour is at the centre of many of the societal issues with which we – individuals, families, communities, employers, schools, and government – are currently grappling. These include but are not limited to shifts in societal priorities; political landscapes, education, and health services delivery; labour mobility; human rights and social justice violations; climate change; hybrid/virtual/in-person work; health and well-being; vaccine hesitancy and uptake; technology and artificial intelligence; open science; abuse and harassment; sport performance; and misinformation. As our Guest Editors note in their message… "psychological science offers empirical insights into how people think, feel, and behave, and these insights are essential for designing policies and programs that produce meaningful results when applied." As such, psychologist scientists, practitioners, and educators have critical roles to play. Those roles can beat the tables in which these and many other issues are being discussed, or in contributing to how a myriad of issues are understood and addressed.

The articles in this issue speak to the ways in which the authors' research has had an impact on policies, programs, and people. As you read through the various pieces in this issue, I hope you will be reminded of the critical role that the application of psychological science can have, does have, and needs to have in so many domains. I also hope you will be inspired to speak of your research to the public, to government officials, to the tri-councils, to institutional administrators, and to other decision-makers in ways that highlight the critical role and impact of psychological science across various domains. We are in a time where psychology as a profession and discipline is not only being impacted, but is also positioned to be most impactful.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Steven M. Smith, Ph.D.
President, CPA, Professor of Psychology
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS

It is a great privilege to be the President of the CPA. We are a collective of over 7000 professionals and students in every province and territory, and in many different settings. Although each one of us will have our own focus in our work, we all to varying degrees rely on the science, practice, and educational components of the discipline to do what we do. By its nature, the work our members engage in has impact.

Importantly, and as highlighted in this issue of *Psynopsis*, our work has meaningful policy implications. This is something that we can forget at times. I recently sat on a grant review panel where applicants had to provide information on their knowledge translation activities. Twenty years ago, when these requirements were just starting to be included in grants, the focus was usually on what journals were being targeted, and at which conferences the applicants were going to present. But now this is much broader: Our research needs to be open access, and we are expected to communicate beyond our peers, to the general public, and to policy makers. When I did my graduate training, the applied aspects of research, the policy elements, and the "real-world" impact, were seen as a "softer" side to our work. It was nice to be able to speak to, but the real world is messy, and you often could not do the types of controlled manipulations in public settings that you could in the lab. I believe these beliefs have changed.

Granting agencies (and governments) need to be able to justify the expense of research to the general public. One way to do that is to highlight the impact that research has on our everyday lives. As noted by this month's guest editors, Drs. Lauren Thompson and Adam Sandford, psychological research has resulted in fundamental changes to processes in legal and other settings. The authors of each of the articles in this month's *Psynopsis* touch on how their research has impacted people and policies. But they also highlight how we can increase our impact. As someone who does a lot of applied research, I agree wholeheartedly with their suggestions: think about how you can speak to the issues facing politicians and policy makers; understand the challenges facing organizations and how your research could benefit them and their stakeholders; consider return on investment; and understand how to bridge the gap between research that focuses on individuals and the need of policy makers to consider larger groups.

My own work focuses on health policy, forensic psychology, undergraduate student success, and the development of inclusive environments in post-secondary institutions and workplaces. These are very applied areas of research. I did not begin my research career doing work in any of these areas, but I moved to these over time as I saw how findings could be used to improve outcomes for people and institutions. I would encourage all of you to think about the potential impact of what you do – I have found it extremely rewarding.

HOW CAN WE STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY?

Glenn Brimacombe, M.A.
Director, Policy and Public Affairs, Canadian Psychological Association, Ottawa, ON

Psychologists and psychological scientists have the extensive training, knowledge, and experience that positions them well for transforming research into impactful applications. It is in their professional DNA and is drawn upon everyday in the work that they do for the people of Canada. After all, psychology in its dimensions is a well-established science-based discipline.

While the undertaking and application of research is foundational in your professional roles, this is not the case when it comes to speaking to a large majority of decision-makers, and here I am talking about elected officials; in the world of the CPA this means parliamentarians – members of parliament and senators.

An important role of the CPA is to advocate on behalf of the profession when it comes to the science, practice, and education of psychology. One area where there is a natural opportunity given that the federal government is *the* dominant funder via the Tri-Councils (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC], and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC]) and other agencies and programs, is research.

Over the past decade, you may know that the federal government's record of accomplishment in funding research has been less than impressive, and some would say abysmal.[1] Knowing this, how can we become better advocates to ensure the government does the right thing? After all, we live in an increasingly competitive world where the creation, ownership, and application of new knowledge matters, and can transform the (mental) health of individuals, communities, organizations, populations, and societies.

Having worked in Ottawa since 1991 as a Strategic Policy Advisor to a number of (mental) health organizations and communities – including physicians, research hospitals and their research institutes, and now psychology – that highly value public investments in research, I want to share with you a few uncomfortable observations.

To begin with, it is critical to understand the context in which we are looking to engage elected officials, of which the large majority do not have a scientific background or full appreciation of what is required to have a high-performing research enterprise. It is also important to note that as essential as research is to improving our overall quality of life and well-being, it is unlikely to become a ballot box question, and often falls before the altar of other more pressing (perhaps political) priorities. At the same time, the research community is often viewed as having a never-ending appetite for more and more public funding without always specifying what may come from such investments or being overly appreciative when governments increase funding, programs, etc.

Knowing these challenges, the question turns to: how can we effectively engage the federal government and others to see the *value* and *potential* of investing in research? Here are a few suggestions:

1. ***Context conditions content*** – given that governments exist within fluid policy environments, it is important to frame our ask(s) in a way that recognizes their context or narrative. In other words, how can we align our priorities with theirs?
2. ***Speak their language*** – we need to speak in a language that decision-makers can easily digest and understand. Often researchers use technical words or jargon that does not resonate with the political class, and if they can't understand what you are saying, they will not be moved to support you.
3. ***Make it real*** – use real-world examples that make your research understandable and relatable. The more politicians understand why and what you are doing and its potential impact, the better the chances of reaching them and moving the needle.
4. ***Be accountable*** – as much as possible, be as clear as you can on the outcomes or impacts (often referred to as return-on-investment [ROI]) that come from federal investments in research.
5. ***Look for those that seek a shared destination*** – the building of strategic alliances with organizations and/or communities that seek the same strategic outcome can deepen and widen our consensus-based voice, increasing the likelihood that we will be heard, and governments will act.
6. ***Say thank you*** – be appreciative of what government has done for you, even if it is not where you would like it to be. This can give you a more positive starting point to build on and continue the conversation.
7. ***Relationships matter*** – Finally, under all of this is the prerequisite of developing ongoing relationships not only with decision-makers but with the highly talented and effective public service, noting that while politicians come and go, senior public servants can be in play for extended periods of time and have a critical role in helping us understand the different (technical, political, relationship) issues at play and the different pieces of information that are needed for governments to make a decision.

If you're interested in learning more, the CPA has developed a suite of tools for members only under the *Very Involved Psychologist/Very Involved Psychologist Researcher (VIPR)* header in the Advocacy section on our website.

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TRANSLATING CHILD TRAUMA RESEARCH INTO ACTION: THE CTRC'S JOURNEY TO INFORM INTERVENTIONS AND POLICY

Shuangbo Liu, B.A., Research Assistant, Child Trauma Research Centre (CTRC), University of Regina, Regina, SK

Nathalie Reid, Ph.D., Director of Child Trauma Research Centre (CTRC) and Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, Regina, SK

Lise Milne, Ph.D., Research Chair of Child Trauma Research Centre (CTRC) and Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina, Regina, SK

COVID-19 dramatically shifted the global research landscape toward health sciences, focusing on anything relevant to mitigating the crisis. This shift in research forced organizations to pause, pivot, or suspend many research activities,[1,2] creating a complex environment for launching new initiatives. Amid these challenges, the Child Trauma Research Centre (CTRC) at the University of Regina emerged as a research initiative, to address critical gaps in child health and well-being research.

Research centres serve as bridges, facilitating knowledge transfer between academia, industry, government, and community.[3,4] This potential for collaboration leverages academic expertise, alongside diverse sectors' talents and needs, to address complex issues. However, research centres often face significant challenges, including financial instability, network-building hurdles, and academic and sectoral silos.[5] Amid these challenges, the CTRC shaped its core aim: to bridge rigorous research with practical outcomes through strength-based, resilience-focused projects aimed at shaping a more equitable world by linking evidence-based findings to real benefits for children, youth, and those entrusted with their care. In this article, we share our experiences launching and maintaining the CTRC, aiming to inspire organizations seeking to establish or sustain their own research and knowledge-sharing hubs.

The beginning

As the director of the CTRC, Dr. Nathalie Reid was hired in September 2019 to bring the CTRC into being. After six months, on March 10, 2020, the CTRC became an official University of Regina research centre. On March 17, 2020, the world entered a global pandemic. By mid-April 2020, the CTRC secured its first research grant: a Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation Connections grant entitled *Creating a digital connections hub to support children in care in Saskatchewan during COVID-19 and beyond*, and in rapid succession was awarded a Canadian Institutes of Health Research rapid knowledge synthesis grant entitled: *Translating knowledge for child welfare organizations across the prairies: Managing the impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of children, families, and workers.* These grants were driven by the CTRC's understanding of practitioners' needs for synthesized and easily accessible research in a time of significant upheaval. This work led to better understanding of the importance of attending to the needs of both children and the adults entrusted with their care. By 2021, the CTRC had secured six research grants, had partnered with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation of Professional Learning to develop a trauma-informed microcredential for educators, and hosted its first conference, *From awareness to action: Supporting systemic responses to sexual violence*, which engaged 212 participants. These initiatives directly translated research into practice, driven by the content in CTRC's Connections Hub, a free, evidence-based resource platform that equips caregivers, service providers, and policy makers with actionable knowledge and tools. By aligning every project with its core mission, the CTRC also began understanding how important research centres could be as knowledge mobilization vehicles.

Bridging disciplines, building solutions

The CTRC's collaborative model integrates psychological research with insights from social work, education, public health, justice and corrections, and community expertise to address urgent, complex challenges prioritized by its partners and stakeholders. For example, its *Tips for…* knowledge mobilization series distills a wide breadth of cutting-edge research findings on child trauma into concise, visually engaging guides. These two- to three-page resources, developed in partnerships with psychology, education, and social work researchers, are shared freely with schools, front-line workers, and caregivers, breaking down complex concepts into simple, actionable strategies aimed at improving resilience and well-being. The CTRC also engages with four national research collaborations, has been on the team that created PSPNET Families, an online hub of upstream psychoeducational supports for public safety personnel families, has partnered with organizations committed to supporting child and youth mental health (e.g., the Canadian Mental Health Association), has worked with government ministries, etc., all in the service of conducting relevant research with real-world applications. Through distilling and synthesizing a vast amount of relevant research, CTRC delivers accurate, ready-to-use knowledge that saves professionals hours on literature searches, allows them to focus on their roles, and supports their ongoing professional development.

Navigating persistent challenges

Despite its successes, the CTRC's journey has included facing systemic barriers inherent to research centres. Its ability to hire permanent staff and build long-term capacity is limited by grant funding. The challenges of continuity stem from needing to cobble together salaries from grant applications that may or may not succeed; this reliance on precarious funding makes it difficult to attract and retain highly qualified personnel.

To navigate this barrier, the CTRC has used digital media to promote its achievements. Highlighting positive outcomes through success stories and data has showcased the Centre's value to potential partners, leading to increased collaboration. The CTRC has also appointed a dedicated research chair who provides leadership and access to additional funding opportunities. By combining active social media engagement and professional research leadership, the CTRC fosters a self-reinforcing cycle: demonstrated impact and expanded networks enhance credibility, driving broader collaborations, securing competitive grants, all to strengthen long-term operational stability.

Conclusion

The CTRC's journey from a hopeful idea to a productive centre exemplifies an unwavering commitment to children's well-being. It also offers a case study for other beginning centres as to the opportunities and challenges they might face in complex environments and times. Research centres committed not only to research, but also to innovative and community-driven knowledge mobilization writ-large, offer a meaningful and productive vehicle for shaping a world where research and real-world change go together.

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Despite decades of effective national and provincial tobacco control efforts, more than 45,000 people in Canada still die each year from smoking tobacco.[1] Most individuals who smoke wish to quit; however, nicotine, the primary addictive component of cigarettes, undermines these efforts. In 2025, the United States (US) Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began soliciting public opinion on reducing the nicotine content to non-addictive levels in cigarettes and certain other combusted tobacco products.[2] This action is the culmination of an extraordinary collaboration between psychological researchers, government, and policy makers, which I had the privilege to contribute to as a psychological researcher.

SCIENCE MEETS POLICY: HOW PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH IS SHAPING FDA NICOTINE REGULATIONS

Sarah S. Dermody, Ph.D., C.Psych., Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, ON

The landmark proposal

Thirty years ago, Drs. Benowitz (physician) and Henningfield (Ph.D. in experimental psychology) coauthored a landmark proposal that it is possible to reduce nicotine levels in cigarettes to a non-addictive level[3] – therefore, averting the massive public health damage that combustible tobacco products continue to have globally. Subsequently, in 2009, the Tobacco Control Act ultimately granted the FDA the authority to reduce, but not completely remove, nicotine from tobacco products if it could be demonstrated that it would improve public health.

Supporting the science to back-up the claim

To catalyze research efforts evaluating the potential public health impact of nicotine reduction policies, several essential components were put into place. First, effective communication channels were established between the FDA and researchers to clarify priority research areas and endpoints. This was facilitated by the FDA establishing its Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) and Tobacco Regulatory Science Program (TRSP), which collaborated extensively with researchers to evaluate the public health impact of nicotine reduction. Second, the FDA and National Institutes of Health (NIH) provided necessary research funding. Third, highly qualified researchers stepped forward to lead this research, particularly psychologists. To further build capacity, specialized predoctoral and postdoctoral training opportunities were established to attract new talent. I received one of these fellowships to train in tobacco regulatory science, which was instrumental in my development as a psychologist.

Key contributions by psychological researchers

Rigorous and timely research was needed to address the following questions: (1) What nicotine level in cigarettes is non-addictive? (2) How would this policy impact people who currently smoke versus those who do not smoke? and (3) Would there be unintended health or mental health consequences of reducing nicotine levels? Psychologists were ideally positioned to lead these efforts given their breadth of expertise in applicable content areas (e.g., addiction and mental health, biopsychosocial models, health), research designs (e.g., experimental, randomized control trials, quasi-experimental, qualitative), data analysis, ability to translate findings into actionable items for policy makers, and leadership skills well-suited to leading multidisciplinary teams.

An exemplar of the contributions of psychologists was the first large-scale (N=840; 10-site) randomized controlled trial study to test the impacts of nicotine reduction on smoking outcomes over a six-week period.[4] The principal investigator Dr. Eric Donny (Ph.D. in health psychology) led the multisite initiative, with most of leading coinvestigators being Ph.D.-level clinical, health, or behavioural psychologists. Ultimately, this study established reducing nicotine in cigarettes to 2.4 mg of nicotine or less per gram smoked, and particularly to 0.4 mg/g, would reduce their addictiveness and improve smoking outcomes.

Over the past 15 years, the successful collaborative efforts between government, policy makers, and researchers resulted in more than 250 publications focused on nicotine regulation. Evidence supports reducing the nicotine content of cigarettes will improve public health by preventing smoking initiation and facilitating smoking cessation.[5] Further, psychologist-led studies have addressed concerns around unintended consequences of nicotine reduction policies by demonstrating that key groups similarly benefit from nicotine reduction, such as those with co-occurring substance (e.g., alcohol, cannabis) or mental health concerns (e.g., depression, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, or bipolar disorder) and youth.[5]

Research impact on FDA policy

Grounded in this research, the FDA has announced its proposal to reduce nicotine in cigarettes and other tobacco products to non-addictive levels and is accepting public comment. The FDA's proposal is the culmination of a tremendous collaboration between policy makers and multidisciplinary researchers, with substantial contributions by psychological researchers. Psychological researchers contributed a robust set of skills that were invaluable for informing this public health policy decision. While it is too early to say whether the FDA will ultimately mandate reduced nicotine, taking this regulatory step could save millions of lives in the US alone. Similarly, strengthening relationships in Canada between policy makers and psychological researchers specializing in tobacco regulatory science can translate into saving hundreds of thousands of lives.

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ADDRESSING POLYSUBSTANCE USE: HOW PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH CAN INFORM POLICY AND INTERVENTION

REVIEW OF THE PREVENTION CONTINUUM

Ashmita Mazumder, Ph.D. Student; **Marc A. Fournier,** Ph.D. Professor; **Suzanne Erb,** Ph.D., Associate Professor and Chair

Department of Psychology, University of Toronto Scarborough, Toronto, ON

Effective policy responses to Canada's polysubstance use crisis require a deeper understanding of the cognitive, behavioural, and social factors that drive substance use patterns. Despite increased investment in harm reduction and treatment, existing policies and interventions often fall short because they are built around models of single-substance dependency and fail to reflect the complexity of real-world use. In 2020, approximately 3.8 million Canadians aged 15 and older reported using multiple substances.[1] By 2022, over three-quarters (78%) of accidental apparent stimulant toxicity deaths (ASTD), that is, deaths caused by intoxication or toxicity resulting from substance use, also involved an opioid.[2] These statistics underscore the rising public health concern of polysubstance use in Canada, involving the concurrent or sequential use of multiple substances. Understanding the motivations behind substance use and the interactions between substances is essential for designing more effective, evidence-based policy – insights that psychology research is uniquely positioned to offer.

Monosubstance vs. polysubstance users: Why one-size-fits-all treatment falls short

People who use multiple substances represent a distinct clinical population with unique risks and treatment needs. Research consistently shows that polysubstance users differ from monosubstance users across multiple dimensions. Studies have found that polysubstance users are significantly younger, more likely to be unemployed, separated, or divorced, and have higher rates of childhood trauma compared to those who primarily use a single substance.[3,4] Many individuals engage in polysubstance use either sequentially to manage withdrawal symptoms and extend the effects of intoxication, or simultaneously to balance or enhance drug effects or

to mimic the effects of unavailable substances.[5,6] Additionally, they score higher on measures of impulsivity and aggression and are more likely to exhibit suicidal behaviours.[3,7,8] Polysubstance users also have higher rates of psychiatric comorbidities, including antisocial personality disorder, which complicates treatment.[3,9,10] Beyond mental health, the physiological and cognitive effects of polysubstance use are often more severe than those of monosubstance use. The combination of different substances can produce synergistic effects, increasing the likelihood of overdose, cognitive impairment, and chronic health conditions.[11-13]

Polysubstance users are also at higher risk for legal and financial problems, making sustained treatment engagement particularly challenging.[9] These differences underscore the need for tailored interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Thus, addressing the gap will require interventions informed by psychological research that recognize the distinct motivations, cognitive profiles, and treatment barriers faced by polysubstance users.

Interventions informed by psychology

Interventions rooted in psychology offer promising solutions by leveraging behavioural science to develop targeted treatment strategies. One such approach is contingency management (CM), a behavioural intervention based on operant conditioning that has been extensively studied for its effectiveness in significantly improving abstinence rates among polysubstance users.[14-17] Despite its success, CM faces several barriers that prevent it from being more broadly adopted in Canada. Without formal exposure to CM during clinical training, many providers feel underprepared to implement CM, citing a lack of formal training.[18]

Compounding this challenge is a misconception that CM constitutes "bribing" patients, a view that overlooks research demonstrating the value of incentives when applied strategically.[18,19] Additionally, some critics worry that CM's effectiveness is limited to the period in which incentives are offered, raising concerns that individuals may revert to baseline patterns once the external rewards are removed.[19] However, longitudinal research supports the efficacy of CM beyond the treatment phase, with studies showing that these interventions maintain benefits up to one year post-treatment.[20] Indeed, successful models of this intervention exist. For example, the US Veterans Health System's nationwide CM program has provided reinforcement to over 6000 veterans across 119 veterans affairs (VA) facilities since 2011.[21] This initiative, primarily targeting stimulant abstinence, has yielded impressive results, with 92% of collected urine samples testing negative for the targeted substance(s).[22] However, scaling such interventions requires overcoming multiple policy barriers, including funding allocations and provider training.

Alternatively, nudging interventions, which refer to subtle changes in the environment or the way choices are presented, offer a promising, low-cost strategy for preventing and reducing polysubstance use by shaping environments to encourage healthier choices.[16,23] Unlike direct incentives or mandates, nudges leverage behavioural science to guide decision-making in ways that make positive choices easier and more appealing. That said, its integration into public health policies remains limited due to ethical concerns. Some critics highlight that these manipulations may bypass individuals' deliberative processes and infringe on their autonomy by targeting cognitive biases while others raise concerns about transparency and public trust.[24,25] To ensure effective integration of such interventions into harm reduction frameworks, it is essential to prioritize knowledge mobilization and strengthen direct communication between researchers and policy makers. When designed and applied thoughtfully, nudges have demonstrated potential as effective tools in substance use by reducing risky behaviours and encouraging treatment engagement.[26-28]

In conclusion, psychology research is instrumental in developing targeted interventions, informing public policy, and designing evidence-based prevention and treatment programs that address the complexities of polysubstance use. By tackling these challenges, psychology research is ideally positioned to inform more effective harm reduction strategies and support systems. While psychology research provides valuable insights into polysubstance use and intervention strategies, its application to policy and programming requires deliberate efforts to bridge the gap between research and real-world implementation. To this end, collaboration between researchers, healthcare providers, and policy makers may facilitate the translation of psychology research into actionable policy. Education campaigns informed by psychology research may help shift public perceptions of polysubstance use, promoting a more nuanced understanding that supports evidence-based treatment.

FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF REFERENCES, PLEASE GO TO CPA.CA/PSYNOPSIS

In recent years, the concept of subjective well-being has gained traction in policy-making circles, with governments worldwide integrating subjective well-being measures into decision-making frameworks. The psychological sciences have been instrumental in shaping this well-being policy revolution. As psychologists, our field has long explored the determinants of subjective well-being, and our research now serves as the foundation for policies aimed at improving the lives of citizens. However, bridging the gap between psychological research and effective policy implementation remains a critical challenge.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE WELL-BEING POLICY REVOLUTION

Felix Cheung, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Canada Research Chair in Population Well-Being, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON

The psychological foundations of subjective well-being research

Psychology has played a central role in defining and measuring subjective well-being. Classic theories, such as the tripartite model of subjective well-being, self-determination theory, psychological well-being, and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, have provided conceptual models for understanding happiness. Empirical research has identified key determinants of well-being, including social relationships, income, health, autonomy, and purpose in life. These findings have profound implications for policy, as they highlight the conditions under which individuals and societies thrive.

With the growing recognition that traditional economic indicators, such as gross domestic product, are insufficient proxies for overall life quality, countries are turning to subjective well-being as a marker for societal progress. For example, Canada has now incorporated subjective well-being in their Quality of Life Framework as a *headline* indicator – providing a barometer for how Canadians are doing.[1] The aspirational goal of this framework is to use survey data on Canadians' perceptions of different domains of their lives to guide budgeting and policy making.[2] Similarly, the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics has incorporated subjective well-being measures to assess holistically the quality of life for citizens.[3] The increasing presence of subjective well-being in policy making comes with opportunities and challenges for psychological researchers and practitioners.

Challenges in translating psychological research into policy

Despite these successes, several barriers hinder the seamless translation of psychological research into policy and programming. First, the conventional focus on individual-level determinants of well-being creates a gap between psychological research and policy making, the latter of which tends to focus on population-level or structural-level changes. While research on individual-level interventions (e.g., gratitude intervention) can be useful for self-help, research on structural-level changes (e.g., policies on income redistribution, housing affordability) holds the promise of improving well-being at a much greater scale. Bridging this divide will require a more multidisciplinary approach between psychologists, economists, policy analysts, and government agencies to develop evidence-based policies.

Second, the ethical considerations behind well-being policy making merits deeper reflection. As an example, measuring population well-being requires us to aggregate individual responses (e.g., on life satisfaction) to form a population-level summary. The current default approach of using the arithmetic mean as the aggregation method may inadvertently overlook the degree of inequality and suffering.[4] However, alternative approaches exist. The ethical framework of sufficientarianism suggests that we should ensure a basic level of well-being for all, and we can measure this by calculating the proportion of people above a certain "suffering" threshold (e.g., a 2 out of a 0–10-point scale). Alternatively, if we adopt an egalitarian framework that prioritizes well-being equity, we can also measure the standard deviation of subjective well-being. These approaches can help mitigate the risks of well-being policies that disproportionately benefit privileged groups while neglecting marginalized communities. Psychologists should advocate for ethical well-being frameworks that align with our collective values.

Finally, variability in well-being determinants complicates policy standardization. Research on personalized happiness and cross-cultural variability in subjective well-being all suggest that psychological insights must be contextualized within local cultural, social, and political landscapes. One-size-fits-all well-being policies may fail to capture the lived experiences of diverse populations, underscoring the need for inclusive and adaptive policy frameworks.

Moving forward: The role of psychologists in policy development

For psychology to continue influencing policy in meaningful ways, the field must actively engage with other social scientists, policy makers, practitioners, and the public. Knowledge mobilization efforts, such as policy briefs, interdisciplinary collaborations, and public engagement initiatives, can help translate research findings into actionable insights.[5-7] Training resources that equip psychologists with policy literacy and communication skills are also essential.[8,9]

The well-being policy revolution represents a significant opportunity for psychology to shape the future of governance. As the field that pioneered the study of subjective well-being, psychology has a responsibility to ensure that research findings are applied ethically and effectively. By strengthening interdisciplinary collaboration, advocating for equitable well-being policies, and addressing the challenges of research-to-policy translation, psychologists can play a pivotal role in building societies that prioritize well-being for all.

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Research highlight: CPA Student Research Grant recipient

Canada is a world leader in refugee resettlement, but starting over is not just about finding a home – it is about healing. Many refugees have survived war, loss, and other traumatic experiences, putting them at high risk for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Up to 86% of trauma-exposed refugees struggle with flashbacks, nightmares, and other PTSD symptoms. We are exploring what makes things better or worse, focusing on two key factors: racial discrimination and social support. No one has studied this in Canada yet, but we expect that more discrimination and less social support will exacerbate PTSD symptoms among trauma-exposed refugees. Our research aims to help mental health professionals provide culturally informed care and push for policies that support refugee well-being. With support from the 2023 CPA's Scientific Affairs Committee Student Research Grant, we are working to ensure refugees get the support they need to truly heal and thrive.

HEALING BEYOND RESETTLEMENT: UNDERSTANDING PTSD IN REFUGEES

Hawra Al-Khaz'Aly, M.Sc. (In Progress), B.A.; **Ling Jin,** Ph.D., R.Psych.
Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB

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ROADBLOCKS – PART OF THE JOURNEY TO SUCCESS:

A PROFILE OF CPA PRESIDENT DR. STEVEN SMITH

Eric Bollman, CPA Communications Specialist

"When I took my first introduction to psychology course, I failed."

Dr. Steven Smith tells his students at Saint Mary's University the story of his first psychology course, and its discouraging outcome, because he understands that being an undergraduate student is difficult. Not only are you in a new and unfamiliar place, you are being taught in a way you may not have previously experienced. Not every student can be expected to find success easily, and that struggle can lead to negative outcomes. Understanding that failure is not unusual is helpful. Success means different things for different students. For some, it may even mean realizing that university (or that particular institution) is not a good fit for them. Understanding that failures and roadblocks can be part of a journey to success for them might be even more helpful.

By most metrics, Dr. Smith has enjoyed success in his career. One-third of Canadians have a bachelor's degree. One-third of those people go on to get a Master's. Just 1% of Canadians have a Ph.D., and of those, fewer than one-fifth go on to get full-time faculty positions. As the 2025 President of the CPA, Dr. Smith is only the 82nd person to hold that position. Dr. Smith is keenly aware of how rare this is, and how privileged he is to be among those select few. He tries very hard to not let his own success colour his perspective and invites his colleagues and peers in academia to do the same.

"Think about who faculty talk to. They talk to the smartest students, the best students, graduate students, and then sometimes the 'problem' students. If the only people you speak to are the honours students, the Master's students, and the Ph.D. students, you're not really thinking about the vast majority of students in the middle who are not part of that group. Also, if you think about the typical trajectory of most faculty members, they became faculty members because they were very good at what they did. They did very well in school, they had support, they knew how to get through university, they got into grad school and did well there, and they're part of the 17% of people with Ph.D.s who get faculty positions. So they're already part of a pretty elite group who worked their way through the system."

"What they know is their own experience. And that is one of really hard work and achievement that led them to where they are. But they don't necessarily see themselves as exceptional, which can sometimes lead people to think 'well I did it, so why can't you?' And the answer is that not everyone is like you. A lot of people didn't have the same advantages you did. They may not have had family that supported them. Maybe they're a first-generation university student, or they're from a community that doesn't support them going to university at all, which is surprisingly common."

"And so being able to consider what that's like was really useful for me when I started to think about ways to support students."

While everyone is familiar with their own experience, their perspective on that experience may change over time. This is certainly the case for Dr. Smith, who is a Red River Metis citizen – but didn't know this until quite recently. He did not grow up on Metis land. When his grandmother married his White Irish grandfather, they moved away from the family land to Prince Albert, where his grandfather became a banker. Able to pass as White, they never mentioned their Metis heritage, and indeed told people they were English. This discovery altered Dr. Smith's view of his own life experiences, and had a big impact on the way he thought about reconciliation and the complicated history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. It also shaped the way he thought about, and approached, working with younger people whose experiences are in their first iterations today.

Dr. Smith is passionate, and purposeful, about supporting students. In particular undergraduate students who, by and large, get less attention and fewer supports at the beginning of what could be a long and demanding few years. One of his lines of academic research involves helping people with criminal records get work, in particular, Black and Indigenous people, who face extra stigma attempting to obtain employment with a criminal record. Dr. Smith brings that lens to his drive to support undergraduate students as well.

"How do we create organizations that are more inclusive? How do we use inclusion to support diversity rather than using diversity to try to get to inclusion? All those things come together in my student success work, which is really all about supporting students from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and diverse skill sets to become more successful. If students feel included, and feel a sense of belonging to a program or institution, they are more likely to be successful."

Dr. Smith is quick to point out that universities use a philosophical approach that hasn't changed a whole lot in about 1000 years. Helping young students work their way through that sometimes unfamiliar system is essential. A university structure may well not be part of the culture or the background of a student arriving for the first time. How a faculty member was taught, and how they flourished as a student, will not be the same for all the incoming students who have been entrusted to their instruction.

Navigating the bureaucracy of a university is no easy task. Few students arrive equipped with the knowledge of the institutional expectations, structures, processes, or procedures. When it comes to moving through a program, graduating, and going on to graduate school, there are even more steps they might not even know exist until they run up against a roadblock. What Dr. Smith and his colleagues have done to address this may seem like an obvious solution – but sometimes the obvious can also be the innovative if you're one of the first to take the step.

"We have inserted student success skills content (e.g., time management, academic skills, financial literacy, inclusive practices, career supports) that students need to know to navigate the institution and their program, into required academic courses. We work with faculty – all of whom are extremely committed to student success – to put this information into their courses in a way that doesn't increase their workload significantly. We have created online modules, which are required content for students to complete, that we can incorporate into first- or second-year courses. We modify it to fit with the course content, and it can reinforce what professors are teaching while teaching them needed skills at the same time."

This program has been in place at Saint Mary's for six years now, in the business program, the core science program, and elsewhere. Dr. Smith and his colleagues have treated it as an experiment, and in doing so have collected the data to know it works. It increases student grades, retention, and most importantly their graduation rate. Their success with this program was such that they just got a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to put a version of it in place at other institutions in Canada and internationally. This fall the program will be running at least four institutions.

Related to this work is the open-access (free to everyone) book *The Evolving Landscape of Post-secondary Student Transitions in Canada: Striving for Best Practices* edited by Dr. Smith

and his colleagues. It's all about what is being done to support first-year students and their transitions into, through, and out of post-secondary institutions across Canada. It includes a survey from colleges and universities across the country, and a chapter on incorporating co-curricular content into required courses. It also talks about what is being done for students with disabilities, Indigenous students, students of African descent, students with disabilities, and compares Canadian higher education supports with those being implemented in the rest of the world.

Says Dr. Smith, "It's important to highlight that all this work is being done in partnership between faculty and Student Affairs and Services. The student affairs professionals are the ones with the expertise around co-curricular content, and can create and curate those modules to fit faculty needs. When faculty and student success staff work together, this allows for faculty to accomplish the goals they want to achieve while getting support and expertise from the student affairs folks who know what the real pain and risk points are for students."

Many of those students will be the leaders of the future, whether or not they know it now. There is a maxim, often attributed to the Original Professor, Plato, that suggests that only those who do not seek power are qualified to hold it. It's almost certainly not something he actually said. Or, it's a version of something he actually said – "the heaviest penalty for declining to rule is to be ruled by someone inferior to yourself" – which has been altered by a 2400-year game of telephone.

Either way, it's a decent…or maybe ham-fisted…way to describe some of Dr. Smith's career trajectory. After failing that first psychology course at CEGEP, Dr. Smith switched his major a few times – to business, to health sciences, and finally decided on psychology when he went to university. After graduating with his Ph.D. from Queen's, he received a job offer from Saint Mary's.

"I was very fortunate to have three offers coming out of grad school. One was in Alberta and another in the States. I decided to go to Halifax because my wife is from here and it seemed like a good compromise. Being a social psychologist I know all about cognitive dissonance, and of course now I believe it was the right decision all along!"

The psychology department was heavily involved in the union at that time, and Dr. Smith ended up joining the negotiation team, and eventually agreed to become Vice-President of the union. The moment he took the position, the President coincidentally resigned, and Dr. Smith found himself without tenure as the President of the faculty union. After a year as President, he was able to take his only sabbatical.

Shortly after the sabbatical, Dr. Smith was chatting with the new Dean of Science at Saint Mary's, whose kids went to the same daycare as Steven's kids. The Dean suggested he apply to become Associate Dean of Science, which he did. Three short years later, he once again found himself in a new position when the Dean took another job and Dr. Smith was asked to become Acting Dean. He applied for that job and became Dean of Science, and later AVP Academic and Enrolment Management. It was in these positions that his attention turned to student success as a focus of his research and administrative initiatives.

And now, in 2025, Dr. Smith has become the President of the CPA. He became a board member in 2024. When the 2025 President-Elect had to step away, although it had not been Dr. Smith's specific plan, he soon found himself nominated for the role of President and was elected to serve by his colleagues on the board.

A leader is someone whose abilities and qualifications are seen by others. They aren't necessarily seeking to lead, but they are willing and happy to step into a leadership role to reciprocate the trust their peers have placed in them. Dr. Smith hopes he can live up to those expectations in this role, and is committed to doing so.

University professors tend to be measured on their research output, in large part because that output is easily quantifiable. How many publications you have and how many times those publications have been cited are easily measured. An "*h*-index" measures some of a researcher's ability, and counts a lot toward promotion and tenure. Their ability as an educator is a lot more intangible. One indicator of a professor's skills as a teacher is the immediate and future success of their students. Future flourishing can be primed at the undergraduate level, nurtured through graduate school, and carried throughout a subsequent career by students who receive excellent support.

When Dr. Smith first put his name forward for the CPA board, he was encouraged to do so by his longtime friend Dr. Meghan Norris. Dr. Norris sat on the board, and thought that Dr. Smith would have something valuable to contribute. She knew this, because she too works hard to ensure student success at every level.

Something she may well have acquired from Dr. Smith, when he was her professor.

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CPA HIGHLIGHTS

A list of some of our top activities since the last issue of *Psynopsis*.

Be sure to contact membership@cpa.ca to sign up for our monthly Psygnature e-newsletter to stay abreast of all the things we are doing for you!

FIRST ANNUAL CPA SATELLITE CONFERENCE: AI AND PSYCHOLOGY

We are launching the Annual CPA Satellite Conference – a yearly event focused on one issue that is important to our members. The first of these events will take place November 14th–15th at the Nest at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The subject will be artificial intelligence (AI) in psychology, as the AI landscape rapidly evolves in Canada and beyond. What does this mean for psychological science, practice, and education in Canada? What can psychology teach us about how we use and interact with AI? What is psychology's place in AI in Canada? Join us in November to find out!

DR. STEVEN SMITH ELECTED 2025–2026 CPA PRESIDENT

Dr. Steven Smith has been elected by the CPA Board of Directors to the position of CPA President and Chair of the Board for the 2025–2026 term. Dr. Smith will bring his extensive experience in connecting psychological science with applied contexts to the role. We offer Dr. Smith our heartfelt congratulations, and we look forward to working with him even more closely in the year to come.

MIND FULL ELECTION SERIES

When the federal election was announced, our Director of Policy and Public Affairs Glenn Brimacombe had just put together a series of primers for psychologists and the public that focused on mental health and government policy. As soon as the election was called, we put out a series of questions people could ask their local candidates about those same issues. Glenn joined the CPA podcast *Mind Full* for a three-part series discussing the primers, the questions, and then the election itself as soon as it was over.

WELCOME TO OUR 2025–2026 BOARD MEMBERS

The CPA welcomes our new Board members, Dr. Saeid Chavoshi, Dr. Mélanie Joanisse, Dr. Janine Hubbard, Dr. Kirby Huminuik, and new CCPPP Partner Representative, Dr. Amanda Maranzan.

Thank you to our outgoing Board members, Dr. Amir Sepehry and Dr. Eleanor Gittens, and outgoing CCPPP Partner Representative, Dr. Sara Hagstrom.

2025 CPA STUDENT RESEARCH GRANT RECIPIENTS

Congratulations to the 2025 winners of a CPA Student Research Grant. These grants recognize exceptional student research in all areas of psychology. This year, grants were provided by the CPA, jointly by the CPA and the Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour and Cognitive Science, and jointly by the CPA and the Council of Professional Associations of Psychologists (sponsored by BMS Canada). The full list of 25 grant recipients is available on the CPA website.

CPA HIGHLIGHTS

CPA 2025 AWARD WINNERS

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2025 CPA awards! Winners received their awards at the CPA's annual convention, which took place in St. John's June 12th–14th.

- Gold Medal Award for Distinguished Lifetime Contributions to Canadian Psychology – Dr. Sandra Byers
- John C. Service Member of the Year Award – Dr. Sam Mikail
- Donald O. Hebb Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology as a Science – Dr. Candice Monson
- Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology as a Profession – Dr. R. Nicholas Carleton
- Award for Distinguished Contributions to Education and Training in Psychology in Canada – Dr. Sara Hagstrom
- Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology – Dr. Patrick McGrath
- Award for Public, Community Service and Human Rights and Social Justice in Psychology – Dr. Anusha Kassan
- Humanitarian Award – Gemma Hickey
- President's New Researcher Awards – Dr. Zhanna Lyubykh and Dr. Ryan Persram

CPA 2025 FELLOWS

Congratulations to our newly-elected fellows for 2025!

- Dr. Stephanie Cassin
- Dr. Alexandra Fiocco
- Dr. Shelley Goodwin
- Dr. Sheryl Green
- Dr. Andrea Piotrowski
- Dr. Deborah Powell
- Dr. Kerri Ritchie
- Dr. Anthony Ruocco
- Dr. Winny Shen
- Dr. Maggie Toplak

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