



REPORT TO COMMUNITY 2020/2021

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WHO WE ARE

The Maritime SPOR SUPPORT Unit (MSSU) supports and conducts patient-oriented research in all three Maritime provinces. We work closely with government stakeholders, health authorities, the research community, health care providers, and patients and caregivers from across New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Our approach helps draw in different perspectives, so that they can shape patient-oriented research and help move evidence into practice more quickly.

WHAT IS PATIENT-ORIENTED RESEARCH?

Patient-oriented research or POR recognizes the experience that patients have of their health condition(s) and the health care system. POR values this knowledge and engages patients as partners, connecting them with health care providers, decision-makers and others, to conduct research to improve health care.

A PART OF A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The MSSU is one of 11 Support for People and Patient-Oriented Research and Trials (SUPPORT) Units that form an integral part of the Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR), a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) initiative that is match-funded by the provinces. The MSSU is the only SPOR SUPPORT Unit that serves more than one province.

WELCOME

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the MSSU has continued to champion patient-oriented research and increase its impact in the Maritime research community.

We have adapted by leveraging technology to communicate and engage with stakeholders, while prioritizing our commitments in support of urgent COVID-19 research.

The MSSU proved to be an important resource for researchers and policy-makers working to shape the pandemic response. Last year, we supported 56 projects related to COVID-19, contributing to a 6% overall increase in demand for our research support services.

We also experienced a 57% increase in data access requests, while continuing to develop our data platforms. Last year, NB-IRDT added 26 new datasets, HDNS implemented new processes for more efficient data access, and the team in PEI

completed the necessary work to launch the Secure Island Data Repository (SIDR).

We made considerable progress in the last year towards establishing a new MSSU Patient Partner Council (PPC), which began meeting in May 2021. As we move into the next phase of SPOR funding, the PPC will be an important vehicle for the meaningful involvement of Patient Partners in MSSU governance and will ensure that the patient voice is incorporated into MSSU activities.

We created two new leadership roles, the Science Lead for Capacity Development (Dr. Mathieu Bélanger), and the Science Lead for Indigenous Allyship and Engagement (Dr. Jason Hickey), who will be working closely with our Science Leads for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (Dr. Katie Aubrecht), and Sex and Gender-Based Analysis (Dr. Natalie Rosen).

We found opportunities to connect with our broader community through a new

capacity development series, and by increasing online offerings of our newly updated Patient-Oriented Research (POR) training in both English and French.

In the coming year, the MSSU looks forward to:

- Exploring collaborative opportunities for Learning Health System (LHS) approaches through consultation with our patients and provincial health authority partners to co-develop locally relevant LHS models.
- Establishing a Maritime-wide Scientist Studentship program—an effort led by our newly formed Capacity Development Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from our partner organizations.
- Supporting the Patient Partner Council and Science Leads to improve our capacity to support the research community in the areas of Patient Engagement; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion; Indigenous Health Research; and Sex and Gender.

It is an exciting time at the MSSU. We are forging new partnerships, contributing to research that has the potential to improve health care in the region, and demonstrating our commitment to our diverse community in tangible ways.

We express our sincerest gratitude to our staff, Patient Partners, partner organizations and the Maritime research community for making these achievements possible, and look forward to continued collaboration and new successes in the coming year.



Dr. David Anderson
Nominated Principal Investigator, MSSU



Marina Hamilton
Director, MSSU

DATA PLATFORMS AND SERVICES


Since its inception, the MSSU has played an important role in helping to establish and expand provincial data platforms that provide researchers and policy-makers with secure access to administrative health data—providing an evidence base for important health care decisions.

Despite the pressures of the pandemic, this has been the busiest year yet for our data platforms. We received 57% more data access requests than last year.

The MSSU works with the provincial data platforms to:


- Create and strengthen data-sharing partnerships to support patient-oriented research
- Develop and maintain infrastructure for hosting health data including linking existing data and adding new data sources
- Support timely and secure access to data in order to maximize the utility of data resources





Our Data Platform
Services experienced a
157%

increase in data
access requests



HIGHLIGHTS

HEALTH DATA NOVA SCOTIA

To meet the rapid turnarounds needed to support the pandemic response, Medavie data—for example provider and patient registries, and billing data—were sent to Health Data Nova Scotia (HDNS) on a monthly basis instead of quarterly. HDNS introduced a new online Feasibility and Cost Estimate form, an important step towards a more efficient data access process. HDNS staff also worked closely with colleagues at NB-IRDT to develop an online version of the administrative data privacy training required for all project team members accessing administrative data from the Maritime provinces. The new online training launched in July 2021.

NEW BRUNSWICK INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH, DATA AND TRAINING

The New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training (NB-IRDT) added 26 datasets to its data holdings, and created linkages to data on wide range of social services. Notably, an information manager agreement was reached in principle with Under One Sky, an Indigenous program supporting children and families in need. NB-IRDT Privacy Officer, Dr. Donna Curtis-Maillet, is leading the national Health Data Research Network (HDRN) Privacy Working Group, and is actively involved in establishing national data standards including the *Guidelines: Informed Consent Wording for Administrative Data Linking*.

SECURE ISLAND DATA REPOSITORY

The MSSU team in PEI made significant progress establishing the Secure Island Data Repository (SIDR). Marking a major milestone on the path to opening, SIDR's Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) was completed in 2020-2021. The PIA involved consultations with stakeholders from the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI), the provincial government, and across the Maritimes—a process supported by HDNS and NB-IRDT. The team also finalized procedural, data access and flow processes, and governance committee documentation for SIDR—wrapping up the necessary work ahead of a much-anticipated launch in the coming year.

MAKING CONNECTIONS, DELIVERING INSIGHTS

Several notable data linkages were made this year, opening new avenues of investigation and generating crucial data to inform health policy and decisions.

The Kidney Transplant Waitlist data housed by the Nova Scotia Multi-Organ Transplant Program was linked with physician billing and hospitalization data at HDNS. Linking these data allows researchers to examine the potential economic benefit of the changes to Human Organ and Tissue Donation Act that came into effect in Nova Scotia in January 2021.

The Nova Scotia Centralized Primary Health Care Provider Waitlist (CWL) is a provincial list for people without a family doctor or nurse practitioner, who are actively seeking one. The CWL was linked to provider registry data along with physician billing, hospitalization, and prescription data held at HDNS. Linking these data allows the researchers to assess changes in the number of people with access to a regular primary health care provider following implementation of the provincial waitlist, and to evaluate these changes and associated health care utilization before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cardiovascular Health Nova Scotia (CVHNS) data was linked with hospitalization and mortality data housed at HDNS to allow researchers to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic response has affected mortality and health care delivery in patients with cardiovascular or neurovascular disease.

A wide range of **public education data** were linked to NB-IRDT data holdings, through an expanding partnership with New Brunswick Government Early Education and Childhood Development. Linking these data allows researchers to study the interaction of education and health, including the education effects of COVID-19 restrictions.

Through a partnership with New Brunswick Government Social Development, NB-IRDT received **Social Assistance data and Long-Term Care (LTC) data**. Researchers are using LTC data to study transitions to Alternate Levels of Care (ALC), hospitals and nursing homes, as a part of an evaluation program to support healthy aging at home. Social assistance data are being used in a host of projects as determinants of health, as an indicator of economic disadvantage, and as outcomes for program evaluation aimed at reducing poverty.



MEASURING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW BRUNSWICK

While the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may not be known for many years to come, it is already evident that each province is having a unique experience. Even within these geographic regions, different groups of people—for example, older and younger people, frontline workers, those with previously diagnosed mental health conditions—are being impacted differently by the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health measures designed to contain it.

To help understand the local context, the New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training (NB-IRDT) produced a report examining how the mental health of people in New Brunswick has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The team, led by principal investigator Dr. Sandra Magalhaes, from the UNB Fredericton Department of Sociology and the MSSU team in Fredericton, analyzed responses to an online survey asking New Brunswick residents to indicate the impact particular factors had on their health. The New Brunswick Health Research Foundation (NBHRF) helped to facilitate access to the data from the survey, which was carried out in August 2020 by Mental Health Research Canada and Pollara Strategic Insights.

The project identified how social factors, economic factors and recreational activities are impacting the mental health of New Brunswick residents and how the pandemic has changed their frequency of engaging in negative behaviours, such as alcohol use, cannabis use and household conflict.

The findings in the report were summarized and shared with the New Brunswick Department of Health at a Knowledge Transfer session in March 2021, and are contributing to the planning and allocation of resources to help identify groups at risk and factors increasing risk to support the province in rebuilding most effectively in the months to come.

“The impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Canadians will be far-reaching. This is the time to capture comprehensive data to drive evidence-based programs and services to strengthen and advance our systems to support strong mental health in Canada,” said Akela Peoples, CEO of Mental Health Research Canada.

Learning from this approach, the MSSU team in Halifax is now working with the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Nova Scotia Health, and a group of Patient Partners, to undertake a similar analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of Nova Scotia residents. This work is being carried out alongside an analysis of administrative and health systems usage data for mental health reasons before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

 [Read the report](#)

 [Watch to learn more](#)

“As there is increasing concern about how our community’s mental health has been impacted while we all do our best to adapt to the rapidly changing course of the pandemic, research such as ours is needed to provide insights into the unique experiences of New Brunswickers.”

Dr. Sandra Magalhaes,
UNB Fredericton Department of Sociology





SUPPORTING RESEARCH

AN ENGAGED APPROACH TO RESEARCH

Each year, we provide hundreds of research consultations and take an active role in collaborative research projects that connect stakeholders across Maritime health systems to address patient and provincial health priorities. MSSU staff have the expertise to support a range of patient-oriented research, and help move evidence into practice to improve health and care for people living in the Maritimes.

Our Expertise



PATIENT
ENGAGEMENT



EVIDENCE
SYNTHESIS



KNOWLEDGE
TRANSLATION



RESEARCH
METHODS



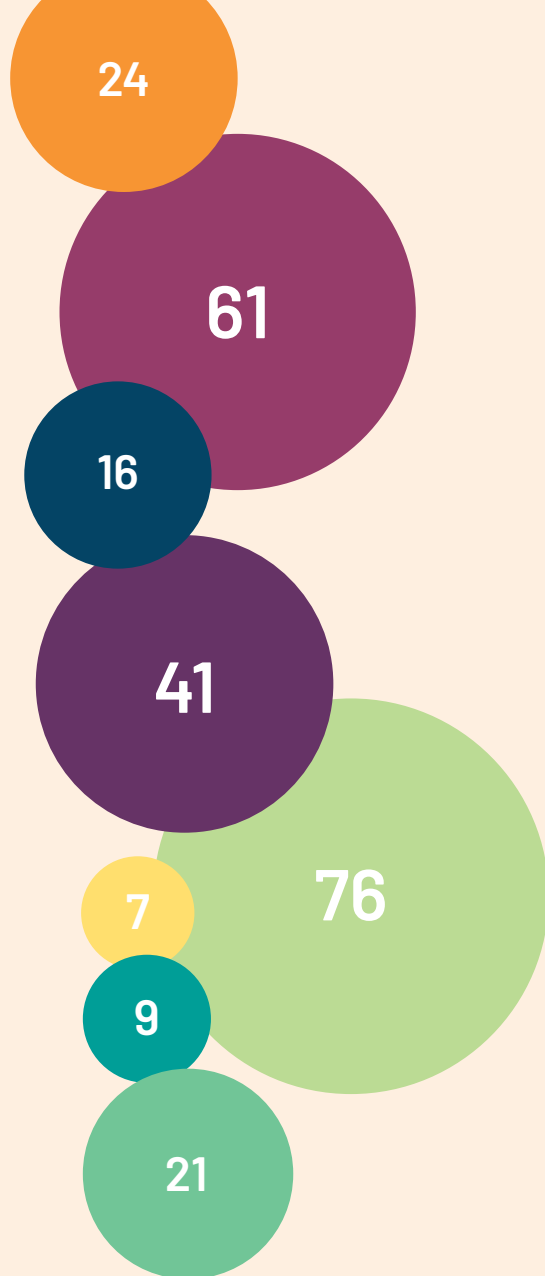
PRIVACY
AND ETHICS



ADMINISTRATIVE
DATA SERVICES

255

Research support requests



RESEARCH CONSULTATIONS

Through our research consultations, we are helping stakeholders across our health systems to better understand complex challenges through patient-oriented research and transform health care by moving evidence into practice. Although our research consultations supported work on a range of topics, by far the largest number of requests were related to COVID-19.

[➤ Learn more about our research consultations](#)

In 2020-21, our research consultations supported work on a range of topics including:

- COVID-19
- Pediatric, perinatal and maternal care
- Public health and social determinants of health
- Primary care
- Health system policy
- Drug prescribing
- Chronic illness
- Emergency care
- Orthopedic care
- Youth mental health
- Seniors' care
- Health technology assessment
- Surgical interventions
- Dementia
- Home and community care

SUPPORTING THE PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The Maritime provinces have a well-earned reputation for their evidence-informed and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our mandate to support research in priority health areas, consultative model, and range of expertise from research methods to evidence synthesis to knowledge translation and administrative health data put the MSSU in a unique position to support the local, regional and national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. We experienced an increase in requests for evidence synthesis support, as health system stakeholders worked to keep pace with the rapidly evolving understanding of COVID-19 and the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes it.

[Read more](#) ↗

56

COVID-19 projects
supported



ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE FOR POTENTIAL TREATMENTS FOR COVID-19

Supporting the COVID Victory Study and the NS COVID-19 Therapeutics and Prophylactics Advisory Group

To aid in the fight against COVID-19, Nova Scotia researchers joined forces on the COVID Victory Study, or CO-VIC Study, to evaluate the effectiveness of existing medications and new therapies to treat COVID-19.

The CO-VIC study takes a real-world, pragmatic and adaptive approach, which means that it needs to evolve as the scientific and medical communities across the globe learn more about COVID-19.

MSSU Evidence Synthesis Coordinator, Leah Boulos, led the development of background summaries on potential COVID-19 treatments for the CO-VIC study. The summaries focused on existing medications that were being investigated in different parts of the world for their potential to treat the virus.

“These summaries built capacity for maintaining investigator and study team COVID-19 knowledge in an environment that is constantly evolving,” said Barbara Goodall, Research Associate – Infectious Diseases with Nova Scotia Health and CO-VIC Study Coordinator.

The MSSU team also generated evidence summaries on the safety and efficacy of various drugs to treat COVID-19 for the Nova Scotia COVID-19 Therapeutics and Prophylactics Advisory Group, which provides recommendations to NS Health and NS Pharmacare to inform COVID-19 medication use in Nova Scotia.

To date, the MSSU team has created 15 background summaries on COVID-19 treatments, which are updated monthly, and new summaries are created when additional potential treatments are identified.

RAPID RESPONSE REPORTS

The rolling waves of COVID-19 infection created considerable and changing challenges for those tasked with managing the ongoing response to COVID-19. Over the past year, the MSSU continued to produce rapid response reports for government and health authority stakeholders to help them make evidence-informed decisions.

Four additional rapid response reports were produced by the New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training (NB-IRDT) for the New Brunswick Department of Health, including reports on lifting COVID-19 restrictions, community resilience, and the mental health impacts of COVID-19. The MSSU team in Moncton produced two rapid response reports for the Vitalité Health Network, on end-of-life care and means of maximizing existing hospital resources during and after the pandemic.

ESSENTIAL COACHING FOR EVERY MOTHER DURING COVID-19


Becoming a mother can be a hard transition under the best circumstances, even more so during a global pandemic. Dr. Justine Dol, a recent PhD in Health graduate from Dalhousie University, developed a text message program to provide education and support to mothers who have recently given birth. The program aimed to improve parents' confidence and feelings of social support while reducing postpartum anxiety and depression, by offering text message support to mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MSSU supported the project by providing advice on how to analyze the data collected from this pilot study. The team is currently undertaking a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate whether this program can improve outcomes for mothers. The MSSU is supporting this next step in Dr. Dol's research by providing guidance on how many participants are needed and how to report results and outcomes. This support will also build the capacity of trainees and early career researchers on the team.

'NAQA'TINEJ INFOGRAPHIC EXPLAINS COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING

MSSU Knowledge Translation Coordinator, Julia Kontak, worked with the Eskasoni Health Centre and Dr. Margot Latimer of IWK Health and Dalhousie University to develop an infographic to explain how contact tracing works and what to do in the Eskasoni community. The infographic was used by the Eskasoni Health Centre, and was revised for use by the Millbrook First Nation community.

SPOR EVIDENCE ALLIANCE

Staying current with rapidly changing evidence, often coming from many different sources, is a constant challenge for policy- and decision-makers. Dr. Janet Curran, MSSU Science Lead for Knowledge Translation, and MSSU staff collaborated closely with the SPOR Evidence Alliance to meet the information needs of the World Health Organization, Health Canada, and others. In total, our team completed nine requests for support including assisting with the design and execution of search strategies, helping to prepare accessible information products, and data analysis for evidence syntheses.

 [Learn more about SPOR Evidence Alliance](#)

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC HEALTH RESTRICTIONS ON SARS-COV-2 VARIANTS OF CONCERN

Dr. Janet Curran and Leah Boulos, MSSU Evidence Synthesis Coordinator, co-led a rapid review of the SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern for the Public Health Agency of Canada and Alberta Health Services. The request was brokered by COVID-19 Evidence Network to support Decision-making (COVID-END), a CIHR-funded, national network dedicated to coordinating Canada's knowledge synthesis response to COVID-19. The COVID-END initiative leveraged the SPOR Evidence Alliance's connections and platform to conduct rapid reviews for decision-makers across Canada. The rapid review will be continuously updated over the next several months, as we learn more about the variants of concern.

[Learn more](#) ↗

SUPPORTING THE WHO PARTNERSHIP FOR MATERNAL, NEWBORN, CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH

MSSU Evidence Synthesis Coordinator, Leah Boulos, and MSSU Knowledge Translation Coordinator, Julia Kontak, working with Dr. Janet Curran and the SPOR Evidence Alliance, contributed to a rapid scoping review commissioned by the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (PMNCH) at the World Health Organization (WHO). The final report, *Effective Knowledge Translation Strategies for Policy and Action Focused on Maternal, Newborn, Child & Adolescent Health and Wellbeing*, maps existing evidence on strategies and activities that facilitate the use of research knowledge in policies and practices related to sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health and well-being. Dr. Amy Grant, MSSU Senior Health Policy Researcher, also worked with this team to conduct meta-analyses of both maternal and neonatal mortality and severe morbidity during the postnatal period. These systematic reviews and meta-analyses will contribute to updated guidelines for optimal maternal and neonatal care in this period.



“The SPOR Evidence Alliance is thrilled to partner with the MSSU on several knowledge synthesis projects, which have informed practice and policy in Canada and internationally. The expertise of the MSSU is world-class, and it has been a pleasure collaborating with them regularly.”

Dr. Andrea Tricco, Nominated Principal Investigator,
SPOR Evidence Alliance

FACILITATING COLLABORATION

RESEARCH ON PRIORITY HEALTH TOPICS

At the MSSU, our collaborative approach puts us in a unique position to facilitate multidisciplinary research teams—helping to draw in different perspectives so that they can shape patient-oriented research and speed its implementation across the Maritimes.

Each year, we take an active role in priority research projects that are designed to address current provincial health priorities and inform health policy decisions. How these projects are identified, structured, and implemented varies from province-to-province. However, the overarching process is similar across all three provinces. Topics for research are identified collaboratively with key stakeholders including government, health authorities and clinicians, and approved by MSSU Provincial Steering Committees, which include Patient Partners. Our role in priority research projects varies from facilitating collaboration and connecting research expertise with the health policy decision-makers to leading multidisciplinary research teams.



SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS IN CARE

The transition from pediatric to adult health care involves many people working together to support young adults. Despite its importance, there is a lack of evidence about best practices for transitions.

The Transitions in Care (TIC) project is combining a qualitative study with a quantitative analysis of administrative health data to build a picture of the current transition process in Nova Scotia. This collaboration grew out of discussions at the MSSU Nova Scotia Bridge Event in June 2019, and involves stakeholders from Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness (DHW), IWK Health, Nova Scotia Health, and Dalhousie University, as well as four Patient Partners.

“Through this research, we’re engaging multiple partners—from patients and families to researchers, administrators and clinicians—to build a comprehensive picture of the transition process. This collaborative approach will help to ensure that our research findings reflect the priorities of those involved and can effectively guide the work of the Transition of Care

Committee to improve transition across the Maritimes,” said Jacklynn Pidduck, Transition Coordinator at IWK Health and co-lead on both the TIC qualitative and quantitative studies.

This past year, the team behind the TIC qualitative study presented their study design and integrated knowledge translation approach at two national conferences, and shared their research partnership experience with the CIHR Health System Impact Fellowship training program. The qualitative team also completed interviews with pediatric and adult health care providers involved in the transition process.

Meanwhile, the analysis is underway for the TIC quantitative study. Using administrative health data, the team are examining patterns of health care utilization for youth with four chronic illnesses and investigating the factors that influence patients’ transition to adult care.

[Read the full story](#) ↗



“I personally had a trying transition, and it has been incredibly meaningful to know that, in the future, youth may have a smoother and more comfortable transition experience because of this research.”

Cassidy Bradley, Patient Partner



HOW DO VIRTUAL CLINIC VISITS HELP NEW MOTHERS?

The health care system plays an important role in supporting mothers after their baby is born, especially when the infant has problems with feeding or shows signs of failing to thrive. Despite the need for support, it is not always feasible for mothers or health care staff to make multiple in-person appointments. The MSSU team in Saint John, NB, is collaborating with the Virtual Care Program and Mother Baby Clinic at the Saint John Regional Hospital to explore the use of virtual care technology for mothers of infants on feeding plans. The team is comparing the experience of mothers whose infants were cared for with regular in-person appointments to those who had virtual care, examining their postnatal perceived stress, maternal functioning, and satisfaction with maternal and newborn health care. The study findings will be used to inform care for future patients at the Mother Baby Clinic.

SUPPORTING PHARMACIST PRESCRIBING IN NOVA SCOTIA

Pharmacists are health care providers that can offer primary care services related to medication. The Pharmacist Prescribing and Primary Care Access project brings together researchers, pharmacists, a Patient Partner, and representatives from the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness (DHW), the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists (NSCP) and the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia (PANS) to learn how often pharmacists are prescribing in the province and the factors that help or hinder these activities. This past year, the research team used administrative health data to build a picture of current pharmacist prescribing practices, and surveyed Nova Scotian pharmacists to better understand their prescribing activity and the supports they need. With the onset of COVID-19, the survey design

was quickly adjusted to examine the impact of the pandemic on pharmacist prescribing. The research team also supported the PUPPY project, which secured a CIHR COVID-19 Rapid Research Operating Grant for more than \$400,000 to study the needs of patients and primary care providers, including pharmacists, before and during COVID-19. Despite the additional hurdles created by the pandemic, the project is entering the final stages of data analysis, and preliminary findings were shared at two national conferences. Ultimately, the project aims to identify ways to support pharmacist prescribing in order to increase access to primary care for Nova Scotians.

EVALUATING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT BREAST SURGERY PATIENTS

Patients in the Maritimes often travel far from home for surgery. Since 2006, the Delta Oasis program, a joint initiative of the Horizon Health Network Breast Health Program and the Delta Brunswick Hotel in Saint John, has provided respite for women who have breast surgery, are sent home the same day, and live more than 100 km from the hospital. The program offers these women overnight accommodations close to the hospital, valet parking, room service, and extramural care. In 2019, Dr. Sharon Chiu, a general surgeon with Horizon Health Network, asked the MSSU team in Saint John to help evaluate this program. The study compares the preoperative anxiety and quality of recovery of the women who used the Delta Oasis program to women who travelled 100 km or more to return home on the day of their surgery. The team is also exploring the impact of the program on the lived experiences of the women who used it. The study findings will help inform the current program and may be used to expand the program to other outpatient surgeries or regions.

“The last year has only highlighted how much we depend on our community for health and healing. Researching this partnership with the Delta Brunswick Hotel will hopefully bring more attention to the benefits of community partnerships and encourage future opportunities to support women with breast cancer.”

Dr. Sharon Chiu, General Surgeon, Horizon Health Network

“



ESTABLISHING RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS ACROSS THE MARITIMES

The MSSU is the only SPOR SUPPORT Unit that operates in more than one province—a structure that creates opportunities to learn and collaborate on innovative solutions to meet the health needs of people living in the Maritimes.

This year, research staff and managers from our five locations developed a new process for establishing interprovincial priority research projects. The process outlines the steps to move from an initial idea to a MSSU-supported project, including detailing the criteria for deciding whether an idea is a good candidate for an interprovincial project. With this process now in place, the MSSU aims to improve transparency and increase the number of interprovincial projects supported by the MSSU.

CARING FOR CHILDREN WITH MEDICAL COMPLEXITY IN THE MARITIMES

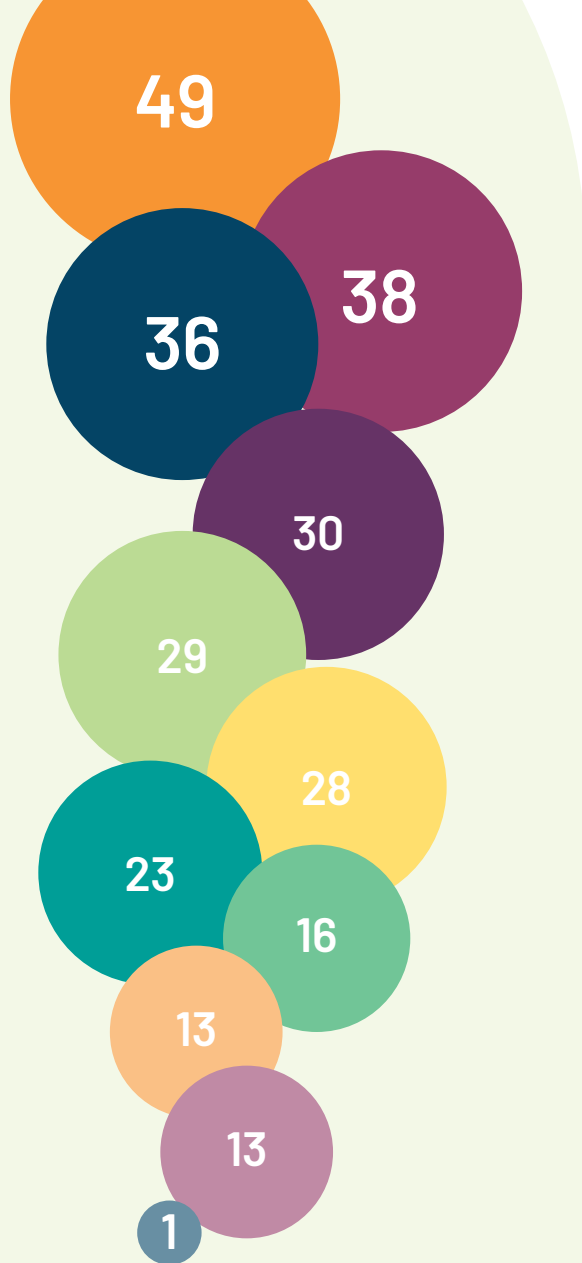
The 'Understanding Children with Medical Complexity in the Canadian Maritimes' project is engaging researchers, clinicians, Parent Partners, and other health system partners from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Led by Dr. Janet Curran, MSSU Science Lead for Knowledge Translation, the research team is using administrative health data from all three provinces to evaluate the performance of three administrative data algorithms to determine the "best fit" algorithm to identify children with medical complexity in the Maritimes. This work addresses a significant gap in health research and is essential for better management and improvement in health outcomes for this vulnerable population. MSSU staff are embedded within the research team, assisting with extraction and analysis of administrative data in all three provinces, providing methodological support, and facilitating patient engagement.



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Knowledge sharing products or events

- Social media promotions
- Conference or symposia presentations
- Reports / technical reports
- KT-related workshops
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- KT-related webinars
- Other
- Online KT tools
- Educational materials
- KT-related meetings
- Books / book chapters

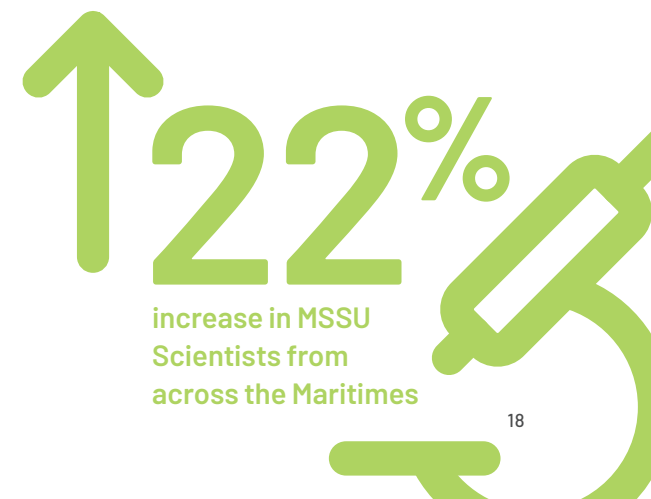


MSSU SCIENTISTS – NEW NAME, SAME GREAT NETWORK

For simplicity, the MSSU Associate and Affiliated Scientist network, created in 2018-2019 as a means of engaging the academic community, was renamed the MSSU Scientist network. To facilitate the involvement of a range of stakeholders in the network, there are still two types of membership, more clearly distinguished as university members and non-university members. Last year, MSSU Scientists made important contributions to the MSSU capacity development activities. Four MSSU Scientists participated on the working group that revised the 2020-21 MSSU Student Awards Research Proposal and assessment criteria, and developed a scoring rubric for applications—putting the emphasis on patient-oriented research and smoothing the application process. A dozen MSSU Scientists also volunteered their time and expertise to peer-review 57 student applications, providing detailed feedback to applicants. And MSSU Scientists are playing a crucial role in co-designing a

new Maritime Studentship Program. Alongside these contributions, MSSU Scientists attended and presented at the 2020 MSSU Annual Meeting, continued to lead priority research projects in Nova Scotia, and joined the newly formed MSSU Learning Health Systems Working Group, which will be guiding our work in this area for SPOR Phase 2. With more than 150 members—a 22% increase over last year—the MSSU Scientist network continues to grow and shape patient-oriented research across the Maritimes.

Get Involved ↗



CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The MSSU offers training on principles and best practices in patient-oriented research, as well as providing forums for knowledge exchange. Like so many aspects of our work, capacity development activities were profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the overall number of trainings offered decreased this year, nearly all our trainings were offered online for the first time—a move that made these events accessible to broader and larger audiences.



KEEPING UP WITH KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

This year, we launched a new capacity development pilot series, Keeping up with Knowledge Translation (KT). The webinar series explored both the science and practice of KT, while highlighting researchers and organizations across the Maritimes. Initially planned as in-person events, the series pivoted to an online platform due to COVID-19—a change that opened these sessions to national and international participation. The pilot series included four sessions which covered the science and practice of knowledge exchange, implementation, communication and patient engagement. More than 300 people attended the webinar series and the feedback from the participants across the series was very positive.



Watch online

NB-IRDT LUNCH AND LEARN WORKSHOPS

The Lunch and Learn workshop series is one of the continuing education opportunities offered at NB-IRDT. Lunch and Learn sessions are free to the public and provide a 1-hour primer on key concepts in research. These noon-hour talks are open to anyone interested in gaining general understanding in areas of data privacy, knowledge transfer, program evaluation, and more. The information presented at Lunch and Learn sessions provides a solid foundation for participants looking to attend NB-IRDT's more in-depth workshops on specific topics, including the "Concepts In..." series.



Watch online



INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF RESEARCHERS

We are committed to supporting the next generation of researchers here in the Maritimes. In 2020, we pledged \$324,500 in funding to two student award programs that provided financial support to 11 graduate students pursuing patient-oriented research at Maritime universities. Additionally, we invested \$50,000 to support five students pursuing their Master of Applied Health Services Research (MAHSR) at Saint Mary's University. All the students received training in patient-oriented research. We are proud to support these leading scholars—their fresh insights and new ideas have the potential to transform our understanding of health and well-being.



See a list of recipients of the 2020-2021 MSSU Student Awards



See a list of recipients of the 2020-2021 NBHRF & CIHR-SPOR-MSSU Studentship Awards.



Watch a video about
Katie's research

WORTH MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS

How capturing older adults' experience of their environments is helping to make spaces more accessible

Katie Vaughan has a passion for enabling accessible communities. With support from an MSSU Student Award, Katie led the Spaces that Work for Me project, under the supervision of Dr. Mikiko Terashima, MSSU Scientist and Lead Researcher at the Planning for Equity, Accessibility, and Community Health (PEACH) Research Unit at Dalhousie University. Teaming up with Community Links, Katie recruited twelve older adults from across Nova Scotia who contributed more than 120 photos that documented how they experience their neighbourhoods. Katie's analysis of the

photos identified three broad themes—streets, destinations, and parks and recreation—and several recurring issues. Katie then assessed whether current accessibility standards and design guidelines reflect these perspectives, and identified 14 priorities to better enable older adults to conduct safe, independent, and healthy lives. Katie has since received an Age-Friendly Communities Grant from the Department of Seniors to continue her work—bringing these activities to more older adults in rural communities.

[Read the full story](#) ↗



PATHWAYS TO PROFESSIONS PROGRAM

The Pathways to Professions (P2P) program, introduced by NB-IRDT in the summer of 2020, provides a 13-week experiential learning program for undergraduate and graduate students at the University of New Brunswick (UNB). In 2020, the initial cohort of six students completed a curriculum to develop professional skills and were matched with researchers who guided their work on community-based projects within their research streams. Due to COVID-19, the program was hosted remotely in collaboration with the Atlantic Institute for Policy Research (AIPR) and the Office of Experiential Education at UNB. Participating students were funded through FutureNB and the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation. Building on its initial success, P2P expanded in 2021—welcoming 20 students and introducing three new data streams. Through workplace training, hands-on research, and connections with local businesses, the P2P program is helping students to develop valuable skills and experience, and preparing them for meaningful work in New Brunswick.

[Learn more](#) ↗

“My time at P2P has given me practical experience tying data to a meaningful story about my community. It gave me a sense of how the technical skills I’ve learned through my degree can be applied in the workforce to generate creative solutions, but also the knowledge translation skills to be able to communicate those solutions to the right audience.”

Madeleine Gorman-Asal, 2020 P2P Data Analyst

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PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

Despite the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MSSU continued to move forward with efforts to formalize patient engagement including the implementation of the new Patient Partner Compensation Policy, developed through a consultative process last year, and we made important progress towards establishing a Patient Partner Council to enable more diverse participation. Patient Partner involvement in governance committees continues to grow, with at least one Patient Partner now serving on each MSSU governance committee—another way to ensure that patients and caregivers are engaged in all aspects of the MSSU’s work.

REDESIGNING PATIENT-ORIENTED RESEARCH TRAINING FOR ONLINE DELIVERY

When COVID-19 arrived, we needed to find a way to safely meet the growing demand for Patient-Oriented Research (POR) training. Dr. Caroline Jose, former MSSU Health and Patient Engagement Researcher, worked closely with MSSU Patient Partner David Wells to adapt the format and content of our in-person POR training for online delivery. To decrease screen time, the training was compressed into two half-day sessions, and the content was tailored for our community by including examples drawn from Maritime projects and emphasizing administrative data research. With the move online, we were able to offer the training on a monthly basis, making it possible for all MSSU Staff members and all 2020-21 MSSU Student Award recipients to complete the POR training. We were also able to extend the training to other SPOR entities. With the support of Diabetes Action Canada (DAC) and André Gaudreau, DAC Patient Partner, we updated the French training materials and now offer the POR training in French every third month.

[Read the full story ↗](#)

A NEW PLAIN LANGUAGE RESOURCE

There are a lot of acronyms and specialized language used in health research and health care. Complicated language can be a huge barrier both to patient and public involvement, and to interdisciplinary research. In a continued effort to open up research and make it more easily understood, the MSSU worked with three Patient Partners—Louise Tardif, Heather Hogan, and Anne MacPhee—to create a glossary of terms that builds off existing resources, and adds a little Maritime flair, including local organizations, programs and resources.

[↓ Download the Glossary](#)

“The MSSU Glossary is a useful and inclusive tool for anyone who is not familiar with the language used in the world of data management and research.”

Heather Hogan, MSSU Patient Partner



GET INSPIRED!

Patient and caregivers are at the heart of patient-oriented research. By partnering in research, they are helping to generate new knowledge and transform our health care systems. In the process, they're improving the health and well-being of their communities—and beyond. One of the best ways to learn about patient-oriented research is from Patient Partners themselves. We recently added two new interviews to our series sharing Patient Partner experiences.



Read all our Patient Partner interviews



MEET VIRGINIA MCINTYRE

For Virginia McIntyre, sharing her experience living with chronic pain was an important step in overcoming stigma and supporting others on their pain journey. We sat down with Virginia to talk about the challenges of living with chronic pain, the importance of peer support, and the role of patient-oriented research in improving care for people living with chronic pain.

Read the full interview 



MEET JIM JENKINS

For Jim Jenkins, health research is all about the patients. We sat down with Jim to hear how to build an effective researcher-patient partnership, and why having patient perspectives at the governing level of organizations is so important.

Read the full interview 



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

NEW SCIENCE LEAD FOR INDIGENOUS ALLYSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

This year, we were pleased to welcome Dr. Jason Hickey as the Science Lead for Indigenous Allyship and Engagement. Dr. Hickey is an Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of New Brunswick and one of five CIHR Indigenous Research Chairs in Nursing. As a non-Indigenous academic, Dr. Hickey works to promote allyship and anti-oppressive research and education, guided by Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Holders, and mentors in the Atlantic region. His current projects focus on Indigenous program development and evaluation, cultural safety and education, and land-based learning.



“My role in the MSSU will be to facilitate allyship and *piluwitahasuwawsuwakon* (allowing your thinking to change so that action will follow in a good way toward truth), so that the MSSU network is better positioned to work alongside Indigenous communities.”

Jason Hickey, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of New Brunswick and MSSU Science Lead for Indigenous Allyship and Engagement

NEW SCIENCE LEAD FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Mathieu Bélanger, MSSU Lead in Moncton, took on the additional role as the Science Lead for Capacity Development. Dr. Bélanger brings a wealth of experience in health research and capacity development, as well as strong ties to clinical practitioners and health authorities. Dr. Bélanger is the Director of Research for the Centre de formation médicale du Nouveau-Brunswick and an Epidemiologist for the Vitalité Health Network. He is also a Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the Université de Sherbrooke and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at the Université de Moncton. In these various roles, he is deeply involved in developing health research capacity in New Brunswick, supporting health professionals involved in research, and teaching doctors and medical students.

PLANNING FOR SPOR PHASE II

This past year, considerable effort went into the preparation of the MSSU Business Case for SPOR Phase 2 funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)—a crucial investment opportunity for patient-oriented research across the region.

The MSSU teams in each Maritime province hosted a series of stakeholder sessions with researchers, policy-makers, clinicians and Patient Partners to co-create our vision for the future of the MSSU and patient-oriented research across the region. A major milestone was achieved when the MSSU Executive Committee approved the Phase 2 funding application, which was subsequently submitted to CIHR for consideration.

In 2020-21, MSSU also formed a working group to develop strategies to best support Learning Health Systems (LHS). As an initial step, this group has begun a series of interviews with academic, health system, and government stakeholders from across the Maritimes to identify ways to support the implementation of LHS across the region.

NEW GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE FOR SPOR PHASE II

As we transition from Phase I to Phase II, the MSSU has introduced a new governance structure, which includes partnerships with the Wabanaki-Labrador Indigenous Health Research Network and the newly-formed PEI Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR) Coordinating Committee. We also created two new MSSU governance committees: the Patient Partner Council and Capacity Development Advisory Committee.

[Lean more](#) 

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

- Acadia University
- Cape Breton University
- Dalhousie University
- Mount Allison University
- Mount Saint Vincent University
- New Brunswick Community College
- Nova Scotia Community College
- St. Francis Xavier University
- St. Mary's University
- Université de Moncton
- University of New Brunswick
- University of Prince Edward Island



GOVERNMENT

- New Brunswick Department of Health
- Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness
- PEI Department of Health and Wellness



RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

- New Brunswick Health Research Foundation
- Research Nova Scotia



HEALTH AUTHORITIES

- Health PEI
- Horizon Health Network
- IWK Health Centre
- Nova Scotia Health
- Vitalité Health Network



2020-2021 ACTUAL (\$CDN)

REVENUE	
CIHR	\$ 2,432,381
Provincial Partners	\$ 2,772,942
Consultation Services	\$ 19,900
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 5,225,223
EXPENSES	
Salaries	\$ 2,745,649
Studentships	\$ 249,100
Operations	\$ 803,340
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 3,798,089

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2020/2021

Funding supports MSSU operations and the evolution of our health research data platforms, methods support to the research community, and our role of bringing researchers, policy-makers, health care providers and patients together to pursue research into health care issues important to the Maritimes.

MSSU is funded by CIHR with a 1:1 match with provincial funding partners. In the fiscal year 2020-2021, MSSU had a total operating budget of \$5.22 million. This was comprised of \$2.4 million from CIHR and \$2.7 million in funding from several Maritime funding partners including the New Brunswick Department of Health, the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, the Prince Edward Island Department of Health and Wellness, the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation (NBHRF) and Research NS.

CIHR and partner surpluses were carried forward as revenue for fiscal 2021-2022.

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