

2020

2021

VHA Research and Innovation Annual Report

A Year In Review

# VISION 2025

By 2025 VHA Research commits to becoming a transformational leader in the home and community health sector, creating solutions for clients, families and providers that embody our values, expertise and experiences.

The following priorities are foundational components of our vision that will cut across our areas of research focus:

- **Data First**
- **Powerful Partnerships**
- **Creating Homecare Scientists**

Our areas of research focus are closely aligned with VHA's strategic goals and are defined by the following three categories:

- **Better Care**
- **More Connected**
- **Safer Teams**

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# LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

2021 was another extraordinary year that brought opportunities for personal and professional reflection, growth & celebration. We strengthened our commitment to evidence-informed decision making by bringing together the thriving Research & Innovation portfolios to allow VHA to leverage the skills and strengths of each department to pursue new challenges and deepen our current partnerships. This exciting change cements our commitment to an organizational culture that is curious, inclusive and dedicated to professional growth and development.

Buoyed by the exciting structural changes, our team remained highly productive and responsive throughout the challenges of the pandemic, continuing to develop new homecare specific studies to generate discoveries that will impact our understanding of care and care delivery. This ongoing crisis has brought into sharper focus the continued challenges caused by inequity in our system and communities and our team is working hard to create and share knowledge necessary for critical dialogue and solutions. In 2021 we supported the evidence-informed design of VHA's first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion survey, strengthened our occupational health and safety practices and partnerships, investigated the impacts of COVID-19 on our providers, clients & families and nurtured the growth of future homecare scientists through our fellowship programs. The

Innovation team hosted our first ever Hackathon event with our AGEWELL partners to surface homecare-specific solutions developed by diverse teams of entrepreneurs, students, point-of-care providers and clients.

The pandemic has highlighted even more significantly the value and importance of research and innovation in addressing the needs of our providers and of our clients and families who overwhelmingly want to remain at home in their communities. VHA Research & Innovation will continue to dedicate our skills and expertise to support their wish to remain safe and independent while receiving the highest quality care and continue to inform, advocate and lead health system change.

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University Health Network

Adjunct Researcher,  
Michael Garron Hospital  
Toronto East Health Network

Member of AGE-WELL Research  
Management Committee and Industry  
Advisory Group; 2021 AGE-WELL  
Honorary Fellow Awardee

## VHA RESEARCH & INNOVATION TEAM

Our commitment to attract and develop home care scientists continued in 2021. We have significantly expanded our team to ensure we can effectively inform change to make care better for clients, families and providers. Please see our VHA Research & Innovation (R&I) Team below:



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# R&I BY THE NUMBERS

VHA's research areas of focus are defined by three categories: Better Care, More Connected and Safer Teams.



23

ACADEMIC TRAINEES

5

RESEARCH FELLOWS

42

POINT-OF-CARE PROVIDERS

10

CLIENT PARTNERS

73

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

3

GRADUATE STUDENT AWARDS

**\$7.9M**

GRANT \$ APPLIED

11

ABSTRACTS AWARDED

15

ABSTRACTS SUBMITTED

21

GRANTS SUBMITTED

5

MANUSCRIPTS PUBLISHED

## ENGAGED IN RESEARCH

# SHARING OUR WORK

## Awarded Grants

Ministry of Labour Training & Skill Development. New Home HealthCare Worker Practices during COVID-19 pandemic. Nichol K., Holness L., McKay S., King E., Giosa J., Holubiec, I. \$220,000

Public Health Agency of Canada Immunization Partnership Fund.PSW-led vaccine education for PSWs: A coalition to rebuild trust and support informed choice. Woods N, Ng S, McKay S, Bamed C, Goldenberg M, Alibi C. \$325,000

Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Health System Impact Fellowship. Examining the Care Transition Experiences of Home Care Clients through Journey Mapping. Saragosa M, McKay S, Kuluski K. \$50,000

TD Community Health Solutions Fund COVID-19 Research Grant Competition 2021. Virtual COVID-19 Recovery Pathway (VICORPA). Fraser I, Istanboulian L, Smith C, Scrivener A, Bean C, McKay S. \$10,000

Future Skills Centre Shock-proofing the Future of Work. Future-proofing the PSW workforce: Towards confidence, competence, and resilience. Ng S, Woods N, McKay S, Paul R, Aiyadura R, Rojas D, Bulmer B, Morey-Hollis M, Tassone M. \$185,000

WeRPN Academic Research Grant Program. Building a sustainable supply of home care RPNs through employer-based education assistance. Bolongaita L, King E, Flecker K, Mehboob F, Uzelac D, Martin T, McKay S. \$14,380

eCampus - Virtual Learning Strategy. Adapting the CACE Homecare Curriculum for pre-licensure health and social care students. Ng S, Woods N, McKay S, Paul R, Aiyaduria D, Lising D. \$15,000

Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease. Field testing anti-fogging solutions for goggles and face

shields. King E, Ameer H, McKay S, Nichol K, Holness L. \$5,000

Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease. Who meets homecare workers' emotional support needs? Nizzer S, Moreira N, King E, McKay S, Nichol K, Holness L. \$20,000

Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease. Charting a path forward for occupational disease prevention in the home care and community support sectors: A stakeholder symposium. King E, McKay S, Nichol K, Holness L. \$15,000

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Engage. Participation and engagement needs of home care rehabilitation professionals transitioning out of the COVID19 pandemic: A pilot study. Nowroz-Kia B, Yazdani A, Sinclair L, Mhairi, K, Sinclair L, Gohar B, King E, Edwards B. \$24,916

## Conferences

Bolongaita L, Zagrodny K, McKay SM, Nichol K, King EC. The effect of COVID-19 on home care PSWs' work absence. 2021 Annual CAHSR Conference, Virtual. May 19-21, 2021.

Zagrodny KAP, Bolongaita L, King EC, McKay SM, Nichol K. Examining the Effect of COVID-19 Policy on Personal Support Worker (PSW) Leave of Absence in a Canadian Home Care Setting. 2021 World Congress on Health Economics (iHEA), Virtual. July 12-15, 2021.

Nichol K, Holness DL, Ruco A, Edwards B, Morgan D and McKay S. Spot It, Prevent It: Program evaluation of a rapid response algorithm for managing workplace violence. World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, Virtual. Oct 4-7, 2021

Nichol K, Ruco A, Holness DL. The Joint Health and Safety Committee Assessment Tool – A Journey towards an Evidence-Based Way to Measure Effectiveness. World

Congress on Safety and Health at Work, Virtual. Oct 4-7, 2021

Zagrodny, K.A.P., McKay, S.M., Bolongaita, L., Nichol, K., King, E.C. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on homecare clients' continuity of care. Canadian Association on Gerontology Conference. October 20-23, 2021

## Publications

Jensen M, Juno C, Fatemi N, Liew K, Ulaj E, Bean C Nixon SA, McKay S. (2021). Navigating the Grey Zone of Physiotherapy Assistant Autonomy in Homecare: Perspectives of Physiotherapists and Physiotherapy Assistants. Physiotherapy Canada, accepted.

Marani H, McKay S, Marchildon G. (2021). The organization of personal support work before and after COVID-19: reflections from Ontario, Canada. Journal of Long-Term Care, accepted.

McGilton K, Vellani S, Krassikova A, Robertson S, Irwin C, Cumal A, Bethell J, Keatings M, Burr E, McKay S, Nichol K, Puts M, Singh A, Sidani S. (2021). Understanding transitional care programs for older adults who experience delayed discharge: a scoping review. BMC Geriatrics. 21, 210 <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-021-02099-9>

Ruco A, Nichol K, Morassaei S, Bola R, Di Prospero L. (2021). Supporting discovery and inquiry: A Canadian hospital's approach to building research and innovation capacity in point-of-care health professionals. Quality Management in Health Care, 30 (4). 267-275. doi: 10.1097/QMH.0000000000000294

Nichol K, Ruco A, Holness DL. Construction sector Joint Health and Safety Committees: Can their effectiveness be assessed using the JHSC Assessment eTool? *In Press*.

# CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE FELLOWS

Designed and run by the Research & Innovation and the Quality, Best Practice & Education teams at VHA, the Champions of Change program provides current point-of-care nursing and personal support workers an opportunity to work together to design and lead a quality improvement project related to VHA's strategic priorities. Through developing, implementing, and evaluating a quality improvement initiative, fellows will drive positive change within their clinical teams. This year, their project focused on how the use of technology can support VHA clients and families living with dementia to manage their medications. We are pleased to announce Donabelle, Sangeeta and Hani as VHA's 2021 Champions of Change!



**Left:** PSWs prepare "Anti-Fogging Kits" to send to their peers.  
**Center:** The research team is visited by Darth Vader on May 4th during a virtual Research Huddle.  
**Bottom:** 2021 Champions of Change fellows pose with VHA Research mentors Emily King and Arlinda Ruco.



Donabelle Lasban has been working as a Personal Support Worker at VHA Home HealthCare since 2017. With a background in nursing before moving to Canada, Donabelle has many skills she has learned to help VHA's clients. She takes pride in continuously learning how to improve the care she provides for her clients. "I believe that if you're open to new ideas, willing to embrace change, and think critically, you can do better in providing quality care. I'm excited to work on this project and looking forward to sharing it with my team," says Donabelle.



Hani Al-Shbat is an internationally trained physician who has been working as a Personal Support Worker for the past two years. He takes great pride in his work. "I have realized that helping people in their daily life is very joyful," says Hani. For his Champions of Change Fellowship project, Hani is looking forward to using technology to help patients with dementia remember to take their medications.



Sangeeta Maharjan is a Visiting Registered Nurse with VHA Home HealthCare. As a Client Choice Award winner in 2020, Sangeeta has a resounding work ethic that focuses on providing the highest quality care for her clients. "I believe medication management is crucial in client's recovery and overall health maintenance. I am taking part in the Champions of Change Interprofessional Fellowship program as a new learning opportunity," says Sangeeta. She is looking forward to designing and implementing a quality improvement initiative related to improving medication safety.



## VHA-UHN COLLABORATIVE ACADEMIC PRACTICE FELLOW

The VHA-UHN Collaborative Academic Practice Fellowship was created through a partnership between VHA Research and the UHN Collaborative Academic Practice Department. This fellowship provides unique opportunities for health care professionals at the point-of-care to improve quality of client care by leading a quality improvement project, related to the organization's strategic priorities, and to engage in ongoing dialogue and learning about leadership and spearheading positive change. Meet our 2021 fellow, VHA Occupational Therapist, Michael Murray!



Michael joined VHA in 2018 working on the Toronto Central paediatric team. More recently Michael has been working with adults and is involved in an integrated palliative care team. Michael has a passion for health equity and working with marginalized communities to support the social determinants of health. His areas of interest are quality improvement, accessible service development, and integration of our complex community health services. Michael is currently completing his Master of Health Administration (Community Care) at Ryerson University. During his time working in the community Michael has identified key areas for improvement for our vulnerable clients. As a VHA research fellow, Michael plans to implement a quality improvement project to support VHA rehab providers in accessing appropriate resources for 2SLGBTQI+ clients. Engaging clients, caregivers, and staff with a goal of making VHA a safer and more accountable space for these clients and to optimize health outcomes and client satisfaction.

VHA Research Focus: **Better Care**

## CIHR HEALTH SYSTEMS IMPACT FELLOW

The CIHR Health System Impact Fellowship program provides highly qualified doctoral trainees studying health services a unique opportunity to apply their research and analytic talents to critical challenges in health organizations outside of the traditional scholarly setting and to develop professional experience, new skills, and professional networks. It connects fellows to organizations from across the health care system who have shared impact projects that bridge the knowledge-to-practice gap where they gain experience in a real-world setting. VHA welcomes Marianne Saragosa!

Marianne Saragosa, a doctoral student at the University of Toronto in the Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation who has received a Health System Impact Fellowship from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to study with VHA Home HealthCare (VHA) for the 2021-2022 academic year. Marianne will work with VHA to examine care transitions among home care clients. She is being mentored by her academic supervisor Dr. Kerry Kuluski at the University of Toronto and by Dr. Sandra McKay, VP, Research & Innovation at VHA.

“By engaging home care clients with prior care transition experiences and their care partners and providers, we want to better understand preceding factors to these movements between settings and potential solutions to avoid or reduce transitions,” she added.

VHA Research Focus: **More Connected**



## JUNIOR RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT AWARDS

The junior researcher development award sponsors promising young scientists and graduate students to diversify research capacity and expertise in the home and community sector. Each year, VHA co-funds up to three graduate students whose work is aligned with the strategic priority areas of VHA Research: Better Care, More Connected, Safer Teams.



Julia Goyal is currently pursuing a Joint Interdisciplinary PhD between the School of Public Health Sciences and Department of Mechatronics and Mechanical Engineering at the University of Waterloo. Her doctoral research focuses on building and validating data-driven models through a mixed-method design to classify, predict and better understand stress in caregiving work. Findings will help develop recommendations for point-of-care and management-level team members and inform workplace practice to promote sustainable and healthy work for personal support workers. Understanding stress will make an important difference in care work, as the health and well-being of personal support workers, in turn, shapes the quality of care provided to clients at home.

VHA Research Focus: **Safer Teams**



Sarah Carbone is a PhD candidate in Health Services Research at the Institute for Health Policy, Management and Evaluation at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include shared decision-making, aging in place and patient and family health care experiences. Sarah's current research explores the decision-making of older adults who considered leaving, or left, long-term care homes during the COVID-19 pandemic. This work will include the perspectives of older long-term care residents, caregivers, and care providers and offer important insight towards the long-term care to home care transition process, and the facilitators and barriers of this type of transition.

VHA Research Focus: **More Connected**



Sheila Addanki is a PhD candidate in the School of Rehabilitation Science at McMaster University. Her PhD research will examine the implementation and impact of the Beyond Silence App, a new evidence-based mental health app designed to provide customized information for workers in healthcare. This real-world implementation study will provide key insights to generate recommendations for optimizing the use of mobile health apps to address the complex and evolving mental health needs of point-of-care workers in health care.

VHA Research Focus: **Safer Teams**

# PARTNERSHIPS

Maintaining and establishing new strategic partnerships to mobilize our research capacity on significant initiatives is a key driver of our **Vision2025**. Cultivating these relationships is essential to our role as a valued partner in the sector and to inform decisions that will impact our clients and providers as well as our ability to deliver services that reflect our vision of homecare. We extend our gratitude to those research and health institutions that supported our work in 2021.

- AGE-WELL
- AwakeLabs
- Canadian Standards Association (CSA)
- Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation
- Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease (CREOD)
- Centre for Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (CRE-MSD)
- Healthcare Insurance Reciprocal of Canada (HIROC)
- Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital
- Home Care Ontario
- Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids)
- Michael Garron Hospital- Toronto East Health Network
- Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association
- Ontario Community Support Association (OCSA)
- Public Health Ontario (PHO)
- Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA)
- Queen's University (Belfast)
- Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto (RGP)
- Ryerson University
  - School of Health Services Management
  - Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing
  - Ted Rogers School of Business
- SE Health
- The Wilson Centre
- Toronto Rehabilitation Institute, UHN
- Unity Health Toronto - St. Michael's Hospital
- University of Guelph
- University of Toronto
  - Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation (IHPME)
  - Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing
  - Department of Physical Therapy
  - Department of Occupational Therapy
  - Department of Mechanical & Industrial Engineering
- University of Waterloo
- VON Canada
- Women's College Hospital
  - Institute for Health Systems Solutions
  - Centre for Digital Health Evaluation
- Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB)

## Safer teams and better care with foggy eye protection solutions

Fogging of facial protective equipment is particularly common for home care providers while assisting their clients with showers and during other high-exertion activities that increase body temperature and sweating. Thanks to CREOD funding we were able to lab-test 14 products with anti-fogging potential and through field-testing and create Anti-Fogging Starter Kits for VHA point-of-care providers.



Read about the CREOD funded project that is helping home care workers with solutions to foggy eye protection on [page 15](#).



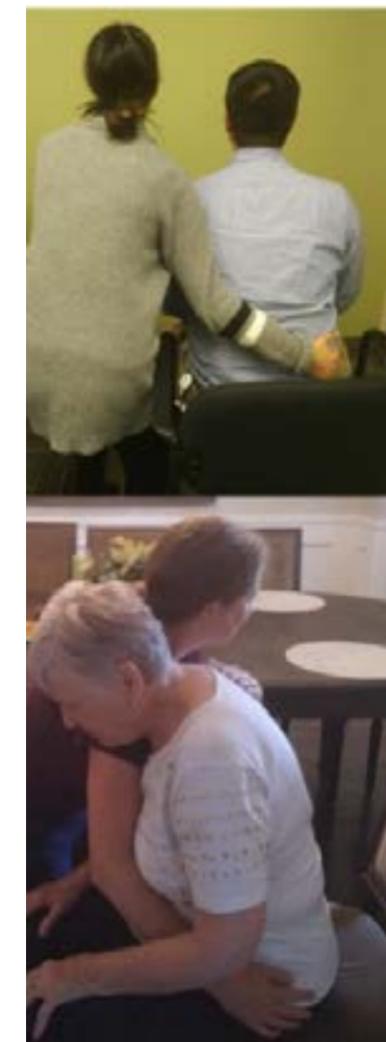
# PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

## Safer Teams through Mobility and Handling Training for Personal Support Workers (PSWs)

Assisting clients to sit down and stand up safely is a common activity for PSWs. If not done properly, both client and caregiver are at risk of injury. There is no standardized training for PSWs through formal educational systems. Thanks to a CRE-MSD funded seed grant, we have been able to develop a framework for evaluating PSW Sit-to-Stand and Stand-to-Sit Training and a Multidisciplinary Analysis of Assisted Sit-to-Stand Techniques. Learn more about the framework [here](#).



Emily King (R) demonstrates recommended sit-to-stand technique



## AgeTech@Home Hackathon

The 2021 AGE-WELL-VHA Hackathon was a month-long opportunity for collaboration to address real-world healthy aging and home care challenges. The process helped AGE-WELL network trainees and VHA staff hone their problem-solving and design skills. The hackathon asked teams to harness their individual strengths in health, business, design, and/or tech while tackling important health and home healthcare challenges.



VHA PSW and Champions of Change Fellow Hani Al-Shbat shares his team's pitch at the final competition. Visit [page 20](#) to learn more about the Hackathon and winning pitches.

# Improving medication administration in homecare

In 2020, Safi Barat, Christine Froude, and Hana Asfaw were selected to participate in the inaugural Champions of Change program. They share their experience implementing a medication administration improvement project.

Words By Vivian Thai

As a registered nurse at VHA Home HealthCare, Safi Barat often found that he wanted to explore solutions to issues that came up in his work. Some of these issues related to medication administration and the potential for human error. When the opportunity to be part of the Champions of Change Fellowship program emerged, he knew he wanted to take that next step towards making a difference. His fellow “champions” felt the same. “I wanted a chance to use my other skills in addition to being a PSW. I was excited to learn new skills and work with other colleagues

to lead change,” said Christine Froude, a PSW at VHA and another Fellow that has just completed the program. Safi, Christine, and Hana collaborated effectively and benefited from the different perspectives from their experiences in nursing and personal support work.

“Together, we were able to identify the gaps in our system and as a front-line team, come up with ideas to make improvements to benefit colleagues and clients,” said Christine.

With the issue of medication administration errors in mind, the Fellows created a form to improve communication about how to support individual clients with their medications. It was designed to provide necessary information about the medications a client takes, where to find them, and the role VHA plays in supporting the client’s medication administration. The form is specifically designed to be shared and used collaboratively by the PSWs and nurses caring for a client. The team also created educational materials to fill gaps they observed in personal support

worker knowledge of medication, which will also help improve medication administration for VHA’s clients.

The Fellows’ work has already made a difference at VHA. Those who have used the form with their clients have found it helpful and see potential for it in the field. It takes the guessing out of ‘if’ a PSW has a role in medication administration, improves communication across a care team and provides better patient outcomes.

Along with these positive impacts for the organization came benefits for the Fellows themselves.

“It takes courage to embark on a program like this, which took the Fellows outside of their usual comfort zones and asked them to create something new,” said Emily King, the manager of Research Operations at VHA. “I admire their willingness to dive in and work together to come up with new ways to improve the quality and safety of the care that VHA provides to our clients.”

The recipients found the program helped them develop new skills to grow in their roles. “This program allowed me to think about what should be done to better serve the community,” said Hana. “It also allowed me to connect with my co-workers, manage my time more effectively and demonstrate my commitment.”

“This program has really helped me grow as an individual. It taught me more about myself each week, helping me recognize my strengths as well as weaknesses,” said Safi. “I now feel more confident in my ability to assess problems, analyze data and help construct possible solutions.”

## “I can see clearly now the fog is gone!”

Field testing project finds solutions for foggy eye protection for home health care workers

Words By Tracey Turriff & Pam Stoikopoulos

For well over a year, home care staff have been wearing extra personal protective equipment (PPE) while providing care to keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. VHA Home HealthCare (VHA)’s Research team surveyed Personal Support and Nursing staff to find out about their experience providing care while wearing masks and either face shields or goggles. Nearly 70% of the PSWs and nurses who responded shared that their goggles and face shields regularly get foggy and that this makes it harder to do their job.

The Research team is committed to creating knowledge that will enable Better Care for our clients, and lead to Safer Teams of providers” says Emily King, Manager, Research Operations at VHA. “When we realized so many of our nurses and PSWs couldn’t safely provide care because they couldn’t see what they were doing, we knew we needed to find a solution.”

The team started by looking for ideas others might have tried for similar issues. They found medical professionals, swimmers and scuba divers who had shared their remedies on Reddit and treatments hockey and ringette players had used for similar challenges with head protection. “I tested 14 solutions and narrowed it down to 3 that seemed to work particularly well. I then ran additional tests on those, including diluting them and wearing eye protection for a longer duration after applying the solution,” shared Huda Ameer, Research Assistant. “We then reached out to nurses and PSWs to ask them to test the top remedies during care

for a real-life test of how the solutions worked and whether they were practical to use.”

Ten personal support and nursing staff acted as field testers trying out each of the 3 treatments while providing client care, and then shared their experiences. The field testing led to a clear solution. VHA’s PSW and nursing testers recommend the use of Dawn dish soap or Live Clean baby shampoo to help everyone see clearly during client care. “The dish soap Dawn is so easy to use,” said PSW Veronica Foisy. “I work in a retirement home and after applying it once it lasted for a full 8-hour shift with 4 showers.” And PSW Coach Joie Francisco shared “I have tried and tested the product in an extremely hot shower. The baby shampoo (Live Clean) gives clear vision for up to 3 clients.”

Based on these field tests by personal support and nursing staff and their recommendations to their colleagues, the Research and Innovation teams collaborated to share and scale this solution. “Financed by VHA’s Ideas to Innovation Fund, the rollout of over 2,200 anti-fogging kits was a true team effort,” says Head of Innovation Engagement, Pam Stoikopoulos, noting that the scale-up required support from several groups at VHA. The research and innovation teams collaborated to create communications materials, the innovation crew coordinated supply acquisition, modified duties workers (i.e. PSWs unable to work in the field) assembled the kits to perfection and VHA’s personal protective equipment (PPE) community hub team worked diligently to distribute to all point of care staff. “The response has been very



Top: Huda Ameer lab tests products Above: VHA’s Anti-Fogging starter kit Below: PSW Chrissy Froude field tests products



positive,” Emily added. “So far most people are telling us that this solution is working for them. We expect health care providers at other organizations are also experiencing these issues and we hope this will help them as well.”

Thank you to our partners at the Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease (CREOD). Findings from this project can be found [here](#).



The shortage of health human resources is a significant challenge for many organizations across the health sector, and the pandemic has only made things worse. VHA Home HealthCare (VHA) has struggled to recruit enough Personal Support Workers (PSWs) to support our increasingly complex clients and especially those who need care on weekends. These capacity issues have limited the ability to accept new clients at times, especially those who require weekend care. Recognizing the tremendous strain, the system is under, VHA sought creative solutions to enable care for all who need it most.

**Finding Capacity – Essential Care on Weekends Pilot Project**

In spring 2021, VHA implemented a pilot in the personal support program called ‘Essential Care on Weekends’ (ECoWs) in one of our regions. Launched with the support of the local Home & Community Care Support Services, this initiative involves weekend personal support service focusing only on ‘essential care’ and adjusting schedules so that ‘care + travel’ can be completed within one hour during peak times. Once essential care is provided, the PSW leaves for the next client. ‘Essential care’ focuses only on what is needed for safety for each client. To allow for ‘care + travel’ to be completed within one hour, PSWs are assigned in smaller geographical teams where travel time between clients is minimized, to 15 minutes or less.

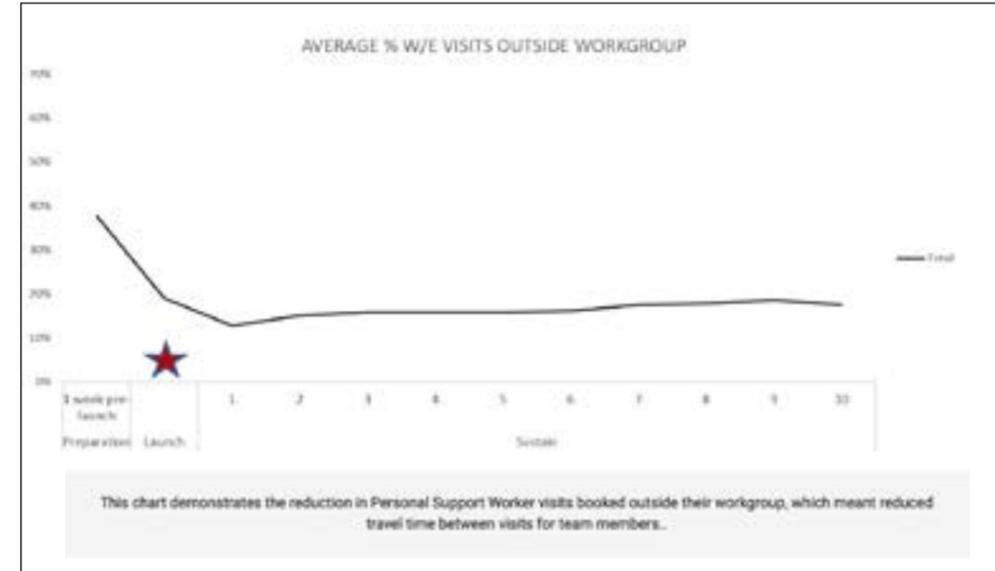
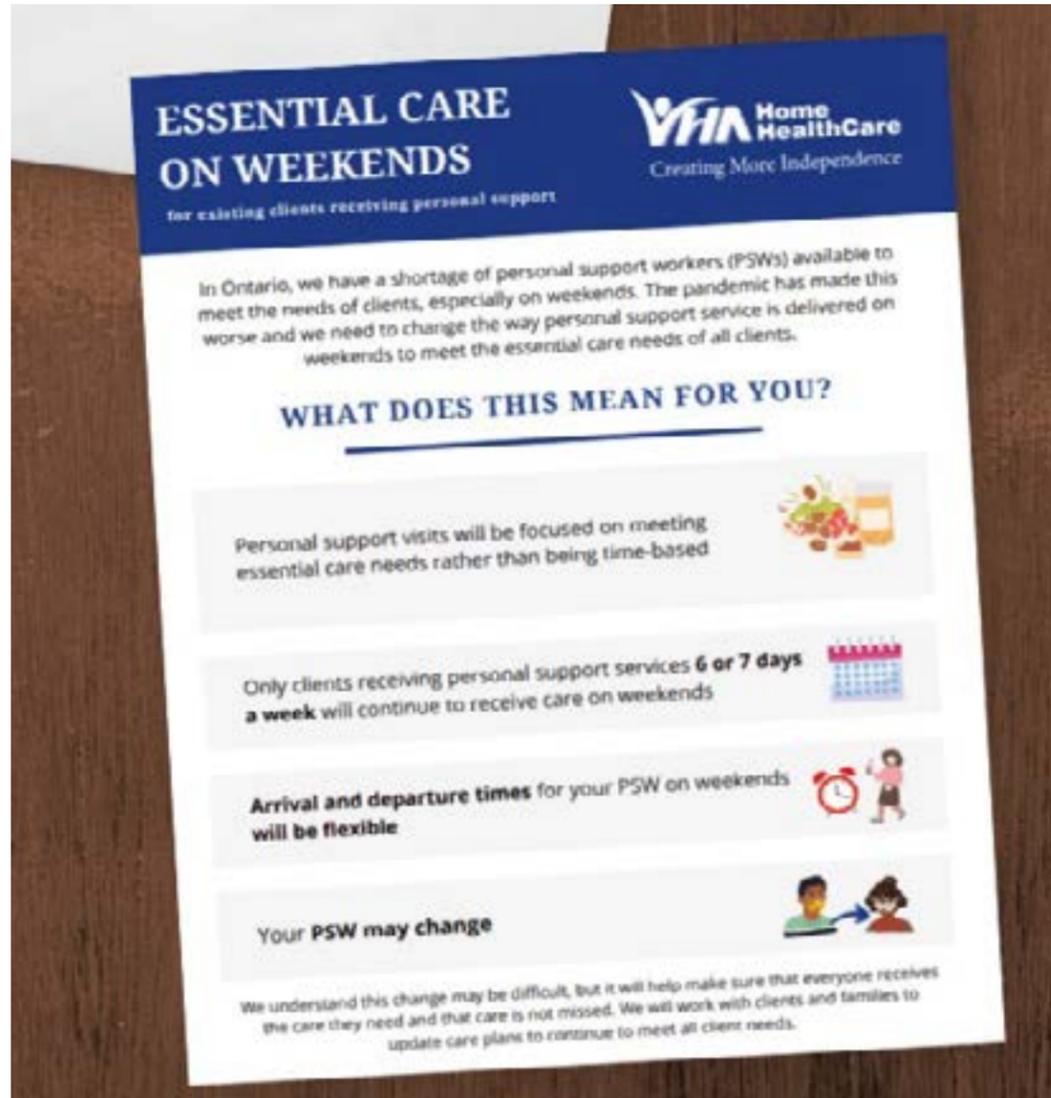
Before launching Essential Care on Weekends, VHA worked closely with the local Home & Community Care Support Services managers and care coordinators and implemented an extensive communications strategy to ensure all clients, PSWs and scheduling Coordinators were aware of and understood the changes in advance. Care plans were reviewed so individual risks and concerns could be discussed and to make sure clients and families were prepared to expect flexible scheduling. And communications reinforced the safety of all clients as the priority. The project team also outlined a logic model and evaluation plan to understand and measure the impact of the initiative including detailed monitoring of client visit scheduling.

**Initial Findings**

“It is clear from the feedback and the data we’ve reviewed that the ECoWs initiative has had a tremendously positive impact on scheduling, especially as it affects the

# Essential Care on Weekends for Personal Support: An Innovative Approach to Building Capacity

Words By Tracey Turriff



“ I’m glad to have the assurance that my high-risk clients will receive the care they need -VHA PSW

experience of our PSWs,” shared Sandra McKay, VP, Research & Innovation at VHA and a member of the ECoWs steering committee and project team. PSWs have appreciated the reduced travel times and the ability to see more clients during their work time. One Coordinator shared that PSWs on her team “love the fact that they are in the same area. They aren’t traveling from postal code to postal code.” Coordinators have indicated that ECoWs has helped them do their job more effectively and they have been able to sustain the adjusted weekend scheduling over several weeks since the launch of the pilot.

On the client experience side, some challenges were expected around managing the changes associated with ECoWs, particularly in situations where new PSWs needed to be assigned based on geography. Strategies were undertaken to mitigate these impacts. But encouragingly, a comparison of client complaints data before and after implementation show no measurable difference.

**Key Learnings**

The proactive communication approach with PSWs, Coordinators, clients and families proved to be very helpful in supporting everyone through this change. As one PSW shared, “the transition has been very smooth for my clients. They know what to expect during their weekend visits.” Ongoing research at VHA has shown that schedules and scheduling efficiency are powerful considerations for PSW work experience. Flexible arrival and departure times translate to reduced stress for personal support workers who otherwise would be constantly rushing to arrive “on time.” The commitment to scheduling practices that

minimize travel time, particularly during the pandemic when many are conscious of limiting time on public transit, has been a meaningful improvement making team members feel respected and appreciated. “We’ve learned a lot about supporting organizational change and effectively sustaining it over time. A strong commitment was needed from everyone – frontline staff, coordinators, supervisors, our data & analytics team and senior leadership as well as the ECoWs steering committee and project team,” added Margery.

Going forward, VHA is looking to expand the ECoWs approach to personal support to other regions. This program is most effective in situations where weekend PS capacity is limited, relative to weekday PS capacity. This will be an important consideration for expansion to ensure that adjustments do not simply shift pressure to different days without resulting in the desired improvements. There also may be opportunities to apply elements of this approach 7 days a week.

“We knew we needed to try something different to address the significant health human resource concerns. The idea for this pilot was generated through a ‘design sprint’ session where team members came up with bold, creative ideas that we then distilled into a program we could implement,” said Sandra. “This is a great example of the benefit of applying an innovation approach to address a major issue for our organization and we are very encouraged by the results of this pilot.”



**When a child's medical needs**

are complex and dependent on technologies like mechanical ventilators or gastrostomy tubes, the transition from hospital to home can be a scary and overwhelming process. Accessing specialized home care that safely supports a child with medical complexity is challenging because advances in technologies and paediatric practice move rapidly and not all home care clinicians have this specific training. These challenges can leave children and families feeling unsupported, distressed, and frustrated with a general lack of confidence in the health care system. Each year The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) discharges over 3,000 children with medical complexity and technology dependence that require specialized home care support to communities all across the province. As these numbers have been steadily increasing with improvements to paediatric medical technology, SickKids received funding from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care—through the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) now Support Services—to develop an integrated service called Connected Care. This program was launched in 2017 to address these longstanding concerns and to improve the child, caregiver and family experience for this population, with the COVID-19 pandemic only further amplifying the need for specialized care at home. “The Connected Care initiative has enhanced the journey from hospital to home for children with medical complexity by delivering education for family caregivers prior to discharge, bridging transitions between care teams and care settings, offering virtual outreach for home and community care providers and partnering with organizations like VHA Home HealthCare to create system-wide change,” said Dr. Krista Keilty, Nurse Practitioner and Associate Chief Interprofessional Practice, Connected Care & System Integration at SickKids. “By supporting safe, high-quality, evidence-informed and standardized

Stephanie Chu, RN & Education and Quality Lead for Connected Care.

**SickKids and VHA Collaborate on Innovative Program to Improve Transitions in Care for Children with Medical Complexity**

Words By Crystal Gonder

**“This level of coordination, support, education and capacity building just isn’t something that has been seen in paediatric hospital to home transitions.**

paediatric home care for children with medical complexity, we can significantly reduce stress levels for family caregivers, build the confidence and competence of everyone involved in their care and reduce hospital readmission rates,” said Dr. Keilty. Connected Care’s specialized paediatric education programs for home care nurses and family caregivers are guided and developed by SickKids educators, expert clinicians, family advisors and home and community care partners including VHA. These programs involve one-on-one training for family caregivers preparing to go home and virtual support after a child is discharged. This includes **Connected Care on the Go!**, a proof-of-concept innovation project with VHA practice and research leads funded by the Registered Nurses’ Foundation of Ontario. The study is currently piloting a mobile service that delivers specialized and customizable paediatric training supplies like teaching dolls and other aids to help home care nurses and primary caregivers practice skills or for families to extend their circle of care, while being coached virtually by a SickKids Connected Care Resource Nurse. “By ensuring that families and the home care team receive the same quality of education—in a consistent way—both groups can feel confident that there is a shared standard of care from the hospital to home, inevitably creating better health outcomes for our patients,” said Stephanie Chu, Registered Nurse & Education and



Quality Lead for Connected Care. “Although not initially motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this past year has highlighted the immense value of virtual education and the opportunity to extend SickKids’ expertise across the province and directly into people’s homes,” Stephanie said. This training is further complemented and supported by **Connected Care Live**, a 24/7 real time, service that links home care providers with an expert SickKids Connected Care Resource Nurse to support and reinforce the skills needed to take care of a child with medical complexity and technology dependence. Some common consultations include troubleshooting paediatric medical equipment, understanding medical orders or medications and practicing specialized skills. Registered users also have access to **Quick Hits**, or regularly updated answers to the most commonly asked questions that arise from these virtual consults. “This level of coordination, support, education and capacity building just isn’t something that has been seen in paediatric hospital to home transitions before—at least to our knowledge,” said Dr. Keilty. “Since the start of Connected Care, VHA leaders have been members of our steering committee and held positions on senior governance tables to help guide the overall strategy of the program and also assisted the piloting of our live

support service, speaking to the initiative’s relevancy to the home care setting. VHA’s research team will also support the testing of Connected Care on the Go! to inform the procurement of equipment, curriculum development and a sustainable operational model for service delivery,” she said. “This partnership is a fantastic opportunity to adapt the way we have always provided education for our paediatric nursing team—especially in the context of the pandemic—allowing us to be even more responsive to our families with children who are medically complex through individualized and distance educational opportunities,” said Dr. Sandra McKay, VP of Research and Innovation at VHA Home HealthCare. “Connected Care on the Go! ensures that the benefits and positive impacts to nursing practice and education can be realized by any nurse, regardless of their employer or geographic location, supporting safe transitions for a high risk and complex population. We are certainly proud of the consultative role VHA has played in the development of this initiative, the strong clinical relationship we have built with the Connected Care team at SickKids and the clear impact these efforts are having across the continuum of care,” Dr. McKay said.



# AgeTech@Home Hackathon Generates Creativity & Collaboration

Words By Pam Stoikopoulos

The dull, grey, shrinking days of late fall can make the most optimistic of people feel a little uninspired. For most AgeTech@Home Hackathon participants, though, the series of brainstorming, workshops and prototyping activities that took place throughout November 2021 filled the month with energy, possibilities, actions and outcomes.

The event, a partnership between VHA Home HealthCare (VHA) and AGE-WELL, Canada’s technology and aging network, was hosted over 30 days instead of the usual time-intensive 24-48-hour hackathon. “We wanted to give participants time to learn how to truly collaborate as a team and shape their ideas into detailed product proposals,” notes hackathon co-organizer and Senior Education and Training Manager at AGE-WELL, Samantha Sandassie. “In doing so, our goal was that several teams would develop practical products and even a viable business by the end of the month.”

Expert help from AGE-WELL network mentors and virtual

workshops on a range of relevant topics such as design thinking, developing a business model canvas, prototyping and pitching helped hackathon participants (a mix of VHA workers, home care clients/caregivers, older adults and members of the AGE-WELL network) explore user-centred design process and deliver more thoughtful, polished results.

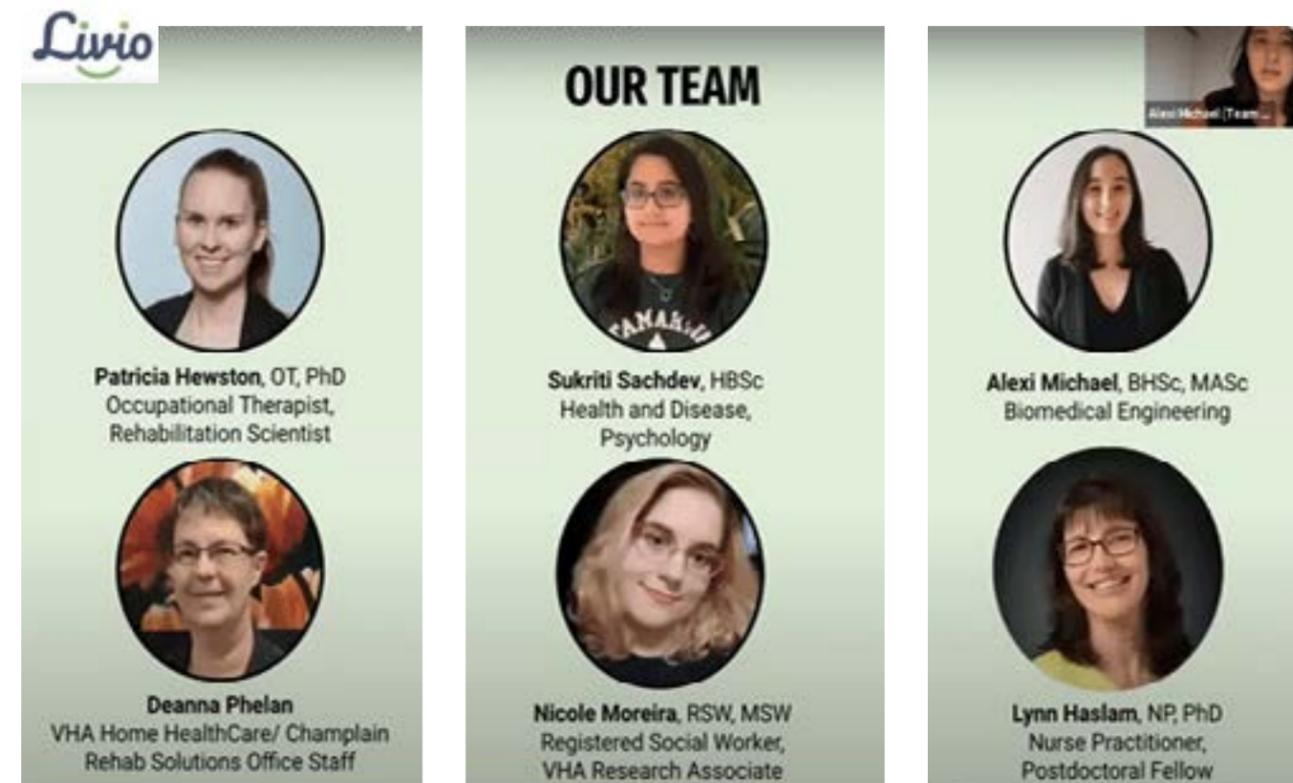
“This hackathon connected a diverse group of people who all have a vested interest in creating a better aging at home experience,” says VHA’s Vice President of Research and Innovation, Sandra McKay. “It was about generating enthusiasm, creativity and ideas around the future of aging to create products and services with real-world application potential,” she adds.

Based on interests, eight teams were assembled to focus on one of three topics: improving health equity as it relates to technology, caregiver support and new ways to meaningfully apply AgeTech in the home. The “crunch” and pressure to produce in such a limited amount of time, can build both excitement and stress,

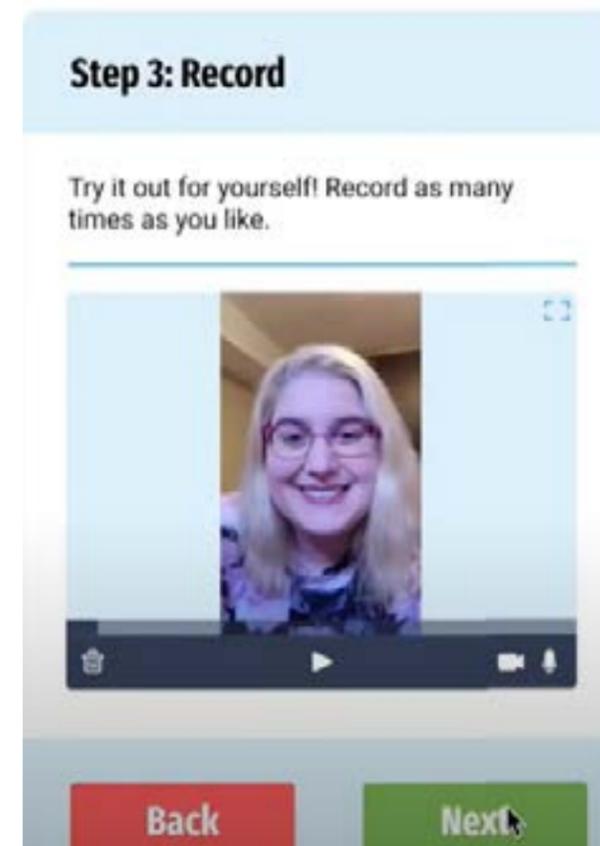
sometimes simultaneously. Though some teams found it challenging to agree on one idea, most eventually found their groove. The top five teams with the highest-scoring video submissions presented a live five-minute pitch to a panel of experienced judges: Director, Best Buy Health, Sara Aghvami Caregiver Advocate, Ron Beleno and Michael Chrostowski, Business Development and Industry Relations Manager at AGE-WELL.

Overall, the judges were impressed by the pitches. Standout moments included a pitch called **Your Assistant** led by VHA Personal Support Worker Hani Al-Shbat. Judge Beleno noted, “this is the very first Personal Support Worker I’ve seen do a pitch. Your voices need to be out there more. Well done.” **Hearty Stripes**—a web-based application aimed at increasing opportunities for socialization and physical activity of rural Canadians—placed second, receiving a \$600 cash prize for their efforts.

It was team **Livio**, however, who captured first place with its personalized video reminder platform



Above: The Livio Team  
Below: Nicole Moreira demonstrates how to use the Livio platform



to help older adults with memory loss navigate their daily lives. The team included VHA Research Associate, Nicole Moreira, Champlain Rehab Solutions Office Staff member Deanna Phelan as well as AGE-WELL network members Lynn Haslam, Alexi Michael, Sukriti Sachdev and Patricia Hewston. In addition to a \$1500 cash prize, the winning team can apply for up to \$5,000 in Seed to Idea funding from VHA and access the AGE-WELL Startup Affiliate Program to further develop their prototype.

“The most exciting part of the project was seeing it ‘come alive’ and it was amazing to see something we had talked so extensively about for only a month turn into something tangible,” says VHA Research Associate and Livio team member Nicole Moreira. “In the beginning, I felt like we were too behind to finish. But a couple of weeks in and I started feeling confident this project could be amazing if we could make it happen. I feel proud of myself and my teammates for winning and look forward to taking Livio further!”

## ABOUT VHA HOME HEALTHCARE

Founded in 1925 as the Visiting Homemakers Association, VHA Home HealthCare (VHA) is a not-for-profit, charitable organization that offers 24/7 health care and support services to people of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Our goal is to provide clients with spectacular service when, where and how they want it to support their independence. Our caring team of professionals includes nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, personal support workers, home support workers, cleaners, social workers, dietitians, and speech-language pathologists. We deliver the highest quality client support at home, in the community and in long-term care facilities.

## VISION, MISSION & BELIEFS

**Vision:** High quality care delivered with great heart - for every person, every time, everywhere

**Mission:** Creating possibilities for more independence, championing the needs of our clients and families and delivering high quality, integrated care

**Core Beliefs:** Our care must be:

**Client-driven** because what matters most to clients and families is what counts

**Spectacular** and continuously focused on quality improvement and safety

**Integrated** and collaborative to unearth innovative answers to complex challenges

**Inclusive** and committed to serving the most vulnerable in our communities

**Inspired** and creative, delivered by a skilled team that has tremendous heart

As a charitable not-for-profit organization led by a volunteer Board of Directors, VHA is committed to:

- Valuing and supporting our staff and care providers
- Fiscal responsibility
- Driving positive change in community support and home health care
- Ethical practices in all our operations

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