



# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

MADE POSSIBLE BY YOUR GENEROSITY

The Le  
 **Royal**

FALL 2024



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# Looking back with pride and gratitude

Over the past year, The Royal has undergone a remarkable transformation, marked by new and highly skilled leadership, groundbreaking progress, and undertaking meaningful work with tremendous impact.

At the start of 2024, The Royal embarked on a new chapter with the arrival of Cara Vaccarino as the incoming President and CEO. With a background in social work and over 25 years of experience in mental health leadership, Cara brings a lifelong commitment to delivering patient- and family-centred care. Soon after, Dr. Sandra Northcott took on the roles of Psychiatrist-in-Chief and Chief of Staff, bringing over two decades of psychiatric experience and a decade of leadership experience.

The momentum continued to build as the already exceptional team welcomed additional new leadership, physicians, scientists, staff, students, volunteers, and dedicated donors. Our community grew, and with it, so did our impact.

We are proud to recognize over 3,000 donors whose generous contributions have been pivotal to our success. Your support has been heightened by the countless hours dedicated by board members, committee members, community event organizers, and numerous other volunteers. We also recognize our Partners in Hope monthly donors, whose consistent support provides a steady foundation for our ongoing work.

With you by our side, we deepened our commitment to meet the needs of those with mental health and substance use issues and the families that support them. This report offers a glimpse into the innovation, discoveries, and people that are making a real difference today — all thanks to your generosity.

**We can do extraordinary things when we work together. Thank you for being a valued member of our community.**

# Reaching more patients and families, thanks to you.

## YEAR IN NUMBERS



**197,543**  
outpatient visits  
by physicians  
and clinicians



**1,554**  
inpatient admissions



**4,198**  
participants in 166  
active research  
projects



**983**  
brain scans at the  
Brain Imaging Centre



**186**  
peer reviewed  
research publications



**The Royal's number one strength is our brilliant team!**

We are committed to ensuring more people get better care, but we cannot do it alone. The generosity of this community is so important. We have bold and exciting plans to accelerate care through research and help more people easily access effective, personalized care. Donors and supporters are playing a huge role in creating a better future for the many people and families impacted by mental illness and substance use disorders.”



**CARA VACCARINO**  
President & CEO, The Royal

## DONOR-FUNDED CLINIC GAVE COURTNEY CONTROL OF HER LIFE

A constant feeling of being overlooked accompanied Courtney's every attempt to open up. "I have struggled my whole life with my mental health and have always found it hard to find the right care for me," says Courtney.

When she turned 30, newly married and a mother to a six-year-old with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Courtney longed for a more sustainable solution for her depression, anxiety, and eating disorder. Her doctor referred her to The Royal's **Prompt Care Clinic**. Within weeks, she underwent an assessment and began receiving psychotherapy. The Clinic offered Courtney something that she couldn't find elsewhere—quick and free access to specialized mental health care.

The Prompt Care Clinic is a true testament to how the community shows up for people during their time of need because, without donors, there would not be a rapid access clinic for people like Courtney. "Going to the Prompt Care Clinic was the first time I felt I would be okay. The entire experience felt personalized. I felt listened to, and I left with tools and coping mechanisms that are still helping me today."



[Read Courtney's story](#)

## BRIDGING GAPS IN EVIDENCE-BASED CARE WITH DONOR SUPPORT

Long recognized for its expertise in caring for individuals with severe psychosis and schizophrenia spectrum disorder, The Royal identified a crucial gap in services. Patients with less severe symptoms often fell through the cracks of the existing system, leading to the design of a new front door to care. The vision for the **Ozardinc Grimes Family Regional Psychosis Clinic** resonated with donors and it opened its doors in 2022.

Since joining The Royal as a nurse over 35 years ago, Lisa Murata has not only witnessed significant changes but has been a driving force behind them.

Today, she is the Clinical Nurse Specialist at the community-based and donor funded clinic. **"This new clinic offers an opportunity to be innovative and agile. We can try new approaches, evaluate their effectiveness, and continuously improve our services. It's all about providing the best fit for our patients and their families, adapting as we learn and grow."**



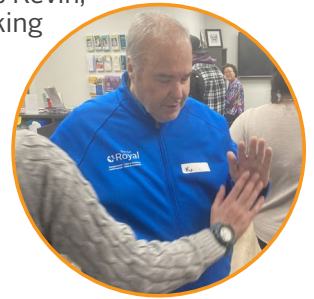
## A HUB OF COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Just beyond the entrance to The Royal, visitors to the Client and Family Resource Hub (The Hub) are greeted with warmth and understanding. Volunteers with lived experience, known as concierges, welcome patients, families, staff, and community members with a spirit of connectivity that has come to define The Hub.

**“Anyone from the community can come in and talk with us – it’s a safe and welcoming space,”** says Kevin Patrick, supervisor of The Hub and member of the Client Advisory Council.

**“Every interaction is unique. There are so many ways we can assist people, whether it is providing resources, helping them access their email, or simply having a conversation. Sometimes, it is just about being there and supporting them where they are at in a safe, non-judgmental and caring way,”** says Kevin, who credits Royal staff, hard-working concierges, and donor support for being key to its success.

**“Meaningful connections are made here every day.”**

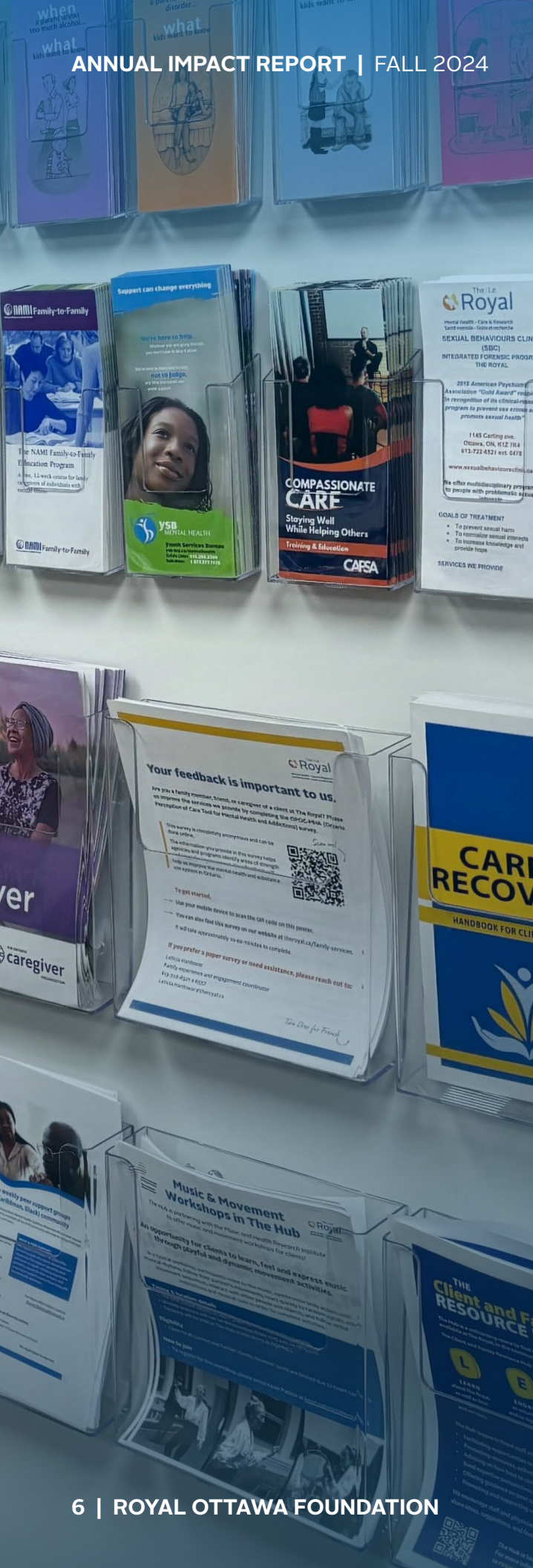


### MEET CHRISTINE, A HUB CONCIERGE

Christine is a volunteer concierge at The Hub who has been there since day one! As a retired librarian and a family member deeply affected by mental illness, she has a talent for connecting people with the information, resources, and comfort they need.

In 2022, Christine's son lost his battle with substance use when he died from an unintentional overdose. In challenging moments, unsure of her ability to make a difference, Christine knows one thing for sure: showing up matters, so she does just that.

**“For some families, no matter how much they want to be involved in their loved one's recovery, there are barriers. In honouring my son's memory, I help other patients and families, and hope to make their path a bit smoother.”**



# Discoveries in Action

Advancements in treating, diagnosing, and preventing mental illness and substance use disorders often begin with research. By combining cutting-edge technology such as our Brain Imaging Centre, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and wearable devices, with a team of exceptional professionals, The Royal's Institute of Mental Health Research is at the forefront of progress, propelling mental health care forward. When you support research at The Royal, you are not just changing lives in Ottawa; you are improving how people are cared for far beyond our nation's capital.

## PERSONALIZING TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION AND COMPLEX MENTAL ILLNESS

Major depressive disorder is a public health crisis, with 40 per cent of affected individuals finding no relief from currently available treatments. Researchers at The Royal are pursuing innovative therapies that are improving access to care and quality of life.

With your support, groundbreaking discoveries have rapidly transformed into widely available treatments that, year after year, show better results for a broader population. Beyond that, research centres have eliminated waitlists, expanded referrals from outside The Royal, and launched new research projects to bring these treatments to even more people.



## ESKETAMINE TREATMENT

Ketamine, used for over 60 years for anesthesia and pain relief, shows fast antidepressant effects when delivered in small doses. A key driver behind mental health research is the hope to inform and improve care for those who need it, and ketamine research is showing it can do just that. The BMO Innovative Clinic for Depression delivers a nasal spray form of ketamine, known as esketamine, for the treatment of major depressive disorder and bipolar depression, and is exploring other ways of delivering the effective treatment.

## REPETITIVE TRANSCRANIAL MAGNETIC STIMULATION (rTMS)

Repetitive transcranial stimulation (rTMS) uses an electromagnetic coil to deliver repeated magnetic pulses that stimulate nerve cells in the brain in a non-pharmacological, non-invasive way, with few side effects. Researchers at The Royal are taking this promising treatment to new heights by introducing brain imaging to better identify malfunctioning circuits in the brain to personalize and, therefore, improve the efficacy of the treatment.



# ACCELERATING RESULTS THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Researchers combine curiosity and diverse expertise to tackle complex questions.

How we approach post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which affects millions in Canada, highlights the power of interdisciplinary collaboration at The Royal. This difficult-to-treat condition demands innovative approaches for diagnosis, treatment, and prevention.

## A BREAKTHROUGH IN NEUROIMAGING

The Multi-Dimensional Assessment of PTSD Subtypes (MAPS) study brings together experts to examine brain function, heart rate, sleep patterns, genetics, and inflammation to improve our understanding of PTSD. A new publication from the team showed increased activity in an area of the brain known as the 'blue spot' for its pigmentation. The study includes 14 co-authors, including eight Royal-affiliated scientists and five Royal-affiliated staff and trainees.

## DIAGNOSING POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

Postpartum depression is the most common complication of childbirth. While PTSD and postpartum depression are distinct, some women experience both. The consequences can be catastrophic for mothers and infants. A study to predict postpartum depression is underway in partnership with The Royal, Dionysus Digital Health, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the National Institutes of Health. It has identified two genes, detected through a blood test, that could predict whether a new mother will experience depression. A diagnostic blood test is expected on the market in the coming years.







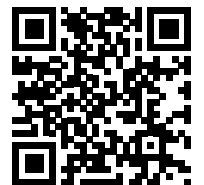
## PATIENT-LED COLLABORATION WITH PROVEN RESULTS

Stellate Ganglion Block (SGB), a simple treatment used to reduce pain, uses a small needle to inject an anesthetic into a collection of nerves in the neck. The neck also contains a main nerve that controls our “fight, flight, or freeze” response, leaving researchers to explore it as a mental health intervention.

Thanks to a donor-enabled Translation of Research into Clinical Care grant, a research team led by Dr. Rebecca Gomez (The Royal) and Dr. Dan James (The Ottawa Hospital) piloted SGB for veterans with PTSD.

Cory Taylor is a retired member of the Canadian Forces Military Police who lives with PTSD. As the study’s first participant, he saw an immediate impact. **“It was just miraculous. This tiny little procedure that is absolutely so non-invasive to have such a dramatic, incredible effect. It feels incredibly overwhelming, just this sense of peace.”** Without Cory, others living with PTSD wouldn’t have the chance to receive this potentially life-changing treatment.

[Watch Cory's story](#)



**PHOTO** Members of the SGB research team at The Royal: Dr. Jakov Shlik, Krysta Boutin-Miller, Dr. Clifford Cassidy, Dr. Rebecca Gomez, Cory Taylor and his service dog Cueinn.

# Leaders in Mental Health Research

From recruiting and enabling emerging research talent to empowering senior scientists and clinicians, The Royal is driven by the dedication of its people. By investing in our people and their research, we can change the future of mental health care.

## DR. ZACHARY KAMINSKY

*DIFD Mach-Gaensslen Chair in Suicide Prevention Research, Institute of Mental Health Research (IMHR) at The Royal*

Dr. Zachary Kaminsky has devoted his career to reducing the alarming prevalence of suicide and suicidal ideation. His disruptive innovation – at the intersection of artificial intelligence and human genetics – is transforming how we identify and intervene with individuals at risk of suicide.

From stigma to science, Kaminsky tackles this immense challenge from multiple angles. Since joining The Royal in 2017 as the DIFD-Mach Gaensslen Chair in Suicide Prevention Research, Kaminsky has been a driving force, locally and internationally.



## EMERGING RESEARCH INNOVATORS IN MENTAL HEALTH (eRIMh) PROGRAM

In 2017, with a spark of curiosity and a passion for innovation, The Royal launched an incubator program for early-career researchers. This donor-funded program provided early and stable funding to seven researchers, recruited from around the world, with the goal of expanding mental health research capacity in Canada.

Among the many accomplishments of this multidisciplinary group during the program's seven years are 177 peer-reviewed publications, 203

conference presentations, and 138 supervised trainees. Notable projects span advancements in brain imaging and stimulation, cognitive health in schizophrenia, and sleep monitoring technology, all of which have made meaningful and lasting contributions to The Royal.

As the program concludes, and we lay the groundwork for the next interdisciplinary research incubator program, six researchers remain at The Royal, with the seventh still involved through ongoing research partnerships.





**PATRICIA BURHUNDULI**

University of Ottawa  
MD/PhD student

Patricia Burhunduli is undoubtedly an inspiration to students pursuing careers in health sciences, whether on the frontlines or in the labs conducting transformative research, as her academic and future career path encompasses both.

Patricia was the first Black student accepted into the highly competitive seven-year combined medical school and doctoral studies (MD/PhD) program at the University of Ottawa, which admits only four students per year. As part of her PhD, she is studying depression and suicide using neuroimaging at The Royal.

Meet Patricia



## RESEARCH IS CARE AT ROYAL OTTAWA PLACE

Royal Ottawa Place (ROP) is a modern long-term care home on the grounds of The Royal. Unique in Ontario, it supports residents with severe mental illness, most of whom are under 65. Staff are grateful for community support, enabling them to provide a mental health-focused care model for this often underfunded population.

In 2023, ROP received a Best Practice Spotlight Organization designation from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario for implementing best practice guidelines. This membership allows staff to share their experiences globally, contributing to improved quality and safety of services.

## DATA-DRIVEN TRISHAW ADVENTURES

Residents at ROP enjoy the outdoors on a donor-supported trishaw, a three-wheeled bike with bench seating. While fresh air is believed to improve mood, precise research data is lacking.

Dr. Natalia Jaworska, a researcher in the eRIMh program, led a study to gather this data, and showed that participants in trishaw outings experienced decreased agitation and stress, along with improved mood. The team is now seeking expanded funding for more outdoor adventure programming.

This project exemplifies how research projects of all size can advance evidence-based mental health care, delivering better outcomes for all.



“Knowing Richard is now safe is an incredible relief. He’s not talkative, but I can tell he’s no longer anxious. These small details make my family and I feel that his needs are taken care of.”

- Brother of Richard, a resident at Royal Ottawa Place

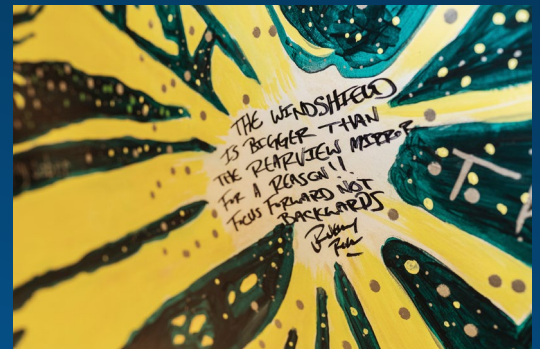
# Jelly Roll's inspiring visit to The Royal

Earlier this year, we witnessed the powerful connection between music and mental health during a private concert hosted by Jelly Roll at The Royal. Surrounded by patients, volunteers, and staff, award-winning country music star and mental health advocate Jelly Roll shared his journey with mental illness and addiction and sang a few of his songs, including a new single, "I Am Not Okay."

While his on-stage performance filled the room with hope and joy, it was Jelly Roll's actions behind the scenes that truly showcased his

deep compassion for others. He toured our units, connecting individually with patients, hearing their stories, and motivating them to keep going. Before leaving, he wrote on the walls as a lasting reminder, "The windshield is bigger than the rear view mirror for a reason! Focus forward, not backwards."

We are incredibly thankful to Jelly Roll for reminding us that even in the shadows of stigma, mental illness, and addiction, there is hope. Thank you to Ottawa Bluesfest for making this magical day happen for our patients.



# Shining a spotlight on YOU



**PHOTO 1** Epic Ride for Mental Health in support of The Royal **2** Ottawa Blues for Youth in support of The Royal **3** Crossing the finish line at the Shoppers Drug Mart Run for Women in support of The Royal **4** Royal Ottawa Place Spring Fling **5** The Shoppers Drug Mart Run for Women in support of The Royal **6** An International Women's Day event presented by Women for Mental Health for The Royal **7** Ottawa Valley Derby in support of DIFD at The Royal **8** Leaders for Mental Health Breakfast presented by Tech Insights **9** Three long-standing volunteers at the Royal Open Golf Tournament presented by Ziebarth Electrical Contractors Inc. **10** The Royal Open Golf Tournament presented by Ziebarth Electrical Contractors Inc.



# Looking forward with renewed ambition

Mental health research and care have long been underfunded, leaving today's treatments effective for only a fraction of those in need. However, community support is helping to fast-track new discoveries into life-changing care.

We take immense pride in the strides made at The Royal over the past year, with achievements reaching far and wide. Together, we improved access to more effective and more timely care when and where it was needed for more people. We accelerated breakthroughs in diagnosing, preventing, and treating mental illness and substance use disorders. We closed gaps in the mental health care system, enabling faster recovery and better health outcomes for those in our care. Because of you, more people are looking ahead to a brighter future.

Our work, however, is far from over. The achievements of the last year inspire us to reach higher and push further. With your support and the momentum you have helped create, we are confident the future holds even greater possibilities, and we cannot wait to shape it together.

## Thank you.



*CHRIS IDE*

**CHRIS IDE**  
**President,**

Royal Ottawa Foundation  
for Mental Health



*Carmen Abela*

**CARMEN ABELA**  
**Chair, Board of Directors,**

Royal Ottawa Foundation for  
Mental Health

*Join us in welcoming  
Carmen Abela as the new Chair  
of the Royal Ottawa Foundation for  
Mental Health Board of Directors!*



**REVIEW THE FOUNDATION'S  
FINANCIAL STATEMENT FROM  
THE PAST FISCAL YEAR**  
*(ended March 31, 2024)*

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